

1981

## Following the drum : British women in the Peninsular War

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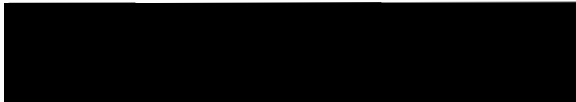
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Sheila Simonson for the  
Master of Arts in History presented March 3, 1981.

Title: Following the Drum: British Women in the  
Peninsular War.

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

  
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Following the Drum: British Women in the Peninsular  
War examines the lives of British women, soldiers' and of-  
ficers' wives, for the most part, who followed the British  
army on campaign in Portugal, Spain, and southern France  
during the Peninsular War (1808-1814). Because most of  
the women were of the working class, their major roles,  
as wives, mothers, widows, workers, and criminals, have  
been contrasted with those roles as defined in British  
working-class culture.

No direct female sources exist for this war. Information was therefore gathered from male diarists, letter writers and memoirists of the period, using modern research into working-class behavior in the early industrial period as a check on the attitudes of contemporary male observers. More than seventy-five memoirists--all in print--were consulted through the British Library and various university collections in this country and Canada. In addition to modern secondary sources on working class women and their families, recent military historians also provided useful information on social class and army structure and customs.

The working-class family pattern proved durable, but significant changes occurred in women's roles in the context of war. Although motherhood appears to have remained unchanged, the absence of social support services, the lack of gainful work for children, and the extreme physical peril placed stress on parent-child relationships. The army as an institution intruded upon the wife's customary service-orientation, and threatened her identity as help-mate. Mortality among men forced a return to the concept of convenient marriage. Women's work paralleled work in the rural parent culture, but the nurse role was threatened by army services at the same

time that certain entrepreneurial opportunities expanded. The greatest transformation occurred in the nature of criminality for which the culture and history of war supplied models of "licensed" deviation, deviation requiring a change of mentality in the criminal. For good or ill, war is a transforming experience. As the lives of these working-class women demonstrate, it changes women as well as men.



FOLLOWING THE DRUM: BRITISH WOMEN  
IN THE PENINSULAR WAR

by

SHEILA SIMONSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

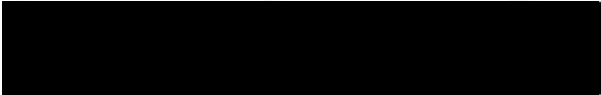
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in  
HISTORY

Portland State University

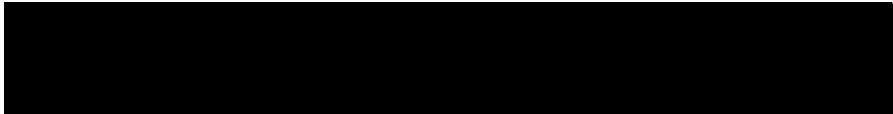
1981

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:


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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Following the Drum examines the experiences of British women, soldiers' and officers' wives, who followed the English army in Portugal, Spain, and southern France during the Peninsular War (1808-1814). Soldiers' wives form a small sub-class of working-class women of the period. They are perceived by contemporary observers as wives or mistresses, as mothers, widows, workers, and criminals, roles available to them in the British parent culture, but oddly transformed in the course of campaigning. Their situation is worth examining, as much for what it reveals of working-class women as for the oblique light cast on a half-forgotten war, but war, for good or ill, is a transforming experience. As these women's lives demonstrate, it changes women as well as men.

The origin of the custom which allowed soldiers' wives to follow British armies on campaign is obscure. Women have always been present in the train of armies, but whether the women were wives, prostitutes, or prisoners is not clear. Hugo Grotius, in The Rights of War and Peace, does not deal with the fact, except in the most general way. Women and children were to be considered non-combatants and their lives spared unless they took up arms, but women were also chattel, and the chattel of an enemy belonged lawfully to the conqueror. Wives of soldiers do not figure in the treatise.

Frederick Wiener, in dealing with the situation of civilians under military justice, does not make a legal distinction between wives and other camp followers, nor does he trace the practice back further than the Glorious Revolution. Sir Charles Oman dismisses it as customary.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the origin of the custom, it was firmly established by 1808.

It is only in the narrow range of time between the spread of literacy in the mid-eighteenth century, and the mid-nineteenth century when the practice of taking soldiers' wives abroad was stopped, that the experiences of British wives as camp followers can be studied at all. Although some information is available for wives with the British forces in America during the Revolution, the Peninsular War is the first war for which substantial information about British camp followers can be found. The custom continued through the Crimean War, and might well be examined for that war and for the campaigns in India between the French wars and the middle of the nineteenth century. The advantages of the Peninsular War as the subject for study are, first, that it lasted for six years, sufficient time to allow for a variety of experiences, second, that it occurred in coherent sequence in a focussed locale, and, third, that a great many diaries, letter collections, and memoirs of the war exist in accessible form. Women, most of them soldiers' wives, accompanied the Peninsular army on campaign in the baggage train of the regiment to which their husbands or lovers belonged. It is to these women's campaign experiences in the Peninsula that this thesis addresses itself.<sup>2</sup>

Between four and six wives for every company of soldiers were traditionally allowed to sail with British troops bound overseas.<sup>3</sup> Not all soldiers were married, by any means, so the proportion of the wives taken to all wives was probably higher than six percent. Some regiments with sympathetic colonels allowed more than the customary number of wives to sail, but that generosity was balanced by the cavalry and some light infantry regiments which avoided taking wives on campaign whenever possible. One regiment of the Napoleonic period (bound for India) is recorded as having between two and three hundred wives in a battalion of about a thousand men, but only sixty wives were taken abroad. Sixty per battalion is given as a typical number for the Peninsular War also.<sup>4</sup>

At a conservative estimate, then, about 1500 British soldiers' wives were transported to Portugal in 1808 at public expense. Various wives of officers and non-commissioned officers who could afford to pay for the passage also followed. The latter group was small, probably fewer than a hundred. George Bell and Judge Advocate Larpent remark on the lack of ladies with the army, meaning, in context, officers' wives.<sup>5</sup> As other regiments came to the Peninsula, their women reinforced the original cadre (though some of the first group were lost in the Coruña retreat) and this practice continued until 1810 when it was temporarily stopped. By the 1813 campaign wives were once more coming out from England to the army.<sup>6</sup>

Preference appears to have been given to the wives of non-commissioned officers, although a question arises as to whether "soldiers' wives" would include the wives of sergeants. Given

contemporary usage of the word soldier, meaning private soldier, probably not. Thus the figure of four to six wives per company may be in addition to sergeants' wives, a number of whom were known to have sailed with the regiments.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the term "camp follower" had a more inclusive meaning than it has now. It referred to all persons, male or female, who were allowed to follow the army on campaign. Camp followers were subject to the same martial law as soldiers and were considered, with some slight ambiguity of status, to be part of the army. Thus, surgeons and commissaries were camp followers, as were muleteers, herdboys, carters, farriers, licensed sutlers, male and female, clerks of various kinds, private servants of officers, and, in this war, the Deputy Judge Advocate General.<sup>7</sup>

Although unmarried women also followed the army, they were mistresses rather than prostitutes, for they were under the "protection" of one man, not generally available for hire. While some officers' mistresses were British, soldiers' mistresses tended to be Spanish or Portuguese women. Most British women with the army--certainly those transported at government expense--were married to soldiers or non-commissioned officers. Either they were formally married women, or their liaisons were of such long standing that they were regarded as wives by observers, who are usually careful to distinguish between wives and female followers. How the term "camp follower" came to be synonymous with "prostitute" is a question for students of Victorian history to pursue. The term had pejorative

connotations at the time of the Peninsular War, but they seem to originate in the greed and drunkenness of sutlers, rather than in the conduct of wives.<sup>8</sup>

Because the events of the Peninsular War are now obscure, a brief summary of the immediate causes, aims, and major actions of the war is included. Although every effort has been made to keep the military facts accurate, and military historians have been consulted throughout the paper, what follows is not military history. From the viewpoint of the army, the presence of non-combatants with the baggage train was a nuisance, wives and children an unnecessary anxiety. Sir Charles Oman, the great Edwardian authority on the Peninsular War, expresses this viewpoint concisely:

One of the worst impediments to the free movement of the host came from the unhappy practice that then prevailed of allowing corps on foreign service to take with them a proportion of soldiers' wives. . . . They were always straggling or being left behind, because they could not keep up with the long marches the army often had to take.<sup>9</sup>

No attempt has been made to justify the presence of women and children with the army. The practice was customary, not rational, and, though contemporary observers were beginning to question it, few questioned the right of soldiers' wives to accompany the troops. Critics, moved by exasperation or compassion, were more apt to suggest that soldiers should not marry at all than that all soldiers' wives should be left behind.<sup>10</sup> The most telling argument against the practice is the fact that it was discontinued.

As army support services grew more and more professional and specialized, the community of camp followers disintegrated, some



(surgeons, nurses, clerks, cooks, transport and supply personnel, even lawyers) becoming soldiers, others dwindling to sleazy and usually local entrepreneurs. This thesis touches briefly on the professionalization of military support services--supply and medicine--insofar as the process affected women's roles. In the parent culture some women's work had undergone or was undergoing a similar transformation, so the parallel is not altogether surprising.<sup>11</sup> The viewpoint adopted, however, is that of social history, not military history.

Any drama inherent in the fact that the women who followed the army were wives derives from the modern reader's conception of camp followers. That they were wives did not surprise their contemporaries. What idea of wifeliness did these British women bring with them from the parent culture? Once they reached Portugal and entered the baggage train of an army on active campaign, did the conditions of war alter their concept of wifeliness in a material way? Before those questions could be addressed, closer inquiry into the social and economic background of soldiers' wives in general was indicated. Not all wives of soldiers posted abroad were allowed to follow their husbands. What became of the wives who were left behind? Did the ideal of sexual fidelity and the practice of wifely service to the husband transfer to the context of war? How did officers' wives, for whom economic need was less compelling, respond to the rigors of campaigning?

If women with the army were most often seen in the wifely role, observers found motherhood and widowhood more dramatic.

Motherhood was risky, to both mother and child, in the parent culture. Did the conditions of war alter the relationship or merely intensify an already anxiety-ridden state? What became of orphans when their mothers died on campaign? Did children with the army play as important an economic role in the family as they played at home? To what extent did the army provide support services for the family on campaign? The probability of widowhood greatly increased in the context of war. Did their husbands' vulnerability alter the women's conception of marriage in any way? What response to widowhood was considered appropriate in war?

Soldiers' wives also figure as workers in the eyes of contemporary observers. Working-class women of the industrial period engaged in a wide variety of employment in addition to their household tasks. Three types of work--survival tasks, involuntary services, and gainful employment with the army--emerged from observers' accounts of women with the army. Which skills developed in the parent culture proved useful on campaign? Did the army as an institution encroach upon women's work role? What opportunities did women with the army find for legitimate gain?

Finally, some women with the army were also perceived by observers in the role of criminal. Although soldiers' wives were most often seen engaged in crimes of gain, their acquiescence in a category of crimes sanctioned by the culture and history of war was found to be one of the most striking features of their behavior. Looting of the dead, general plunder, and the sacking of besieged towns required special scrutiny with respect to camp followers.

Criminality had to be set, not only the context of crime in the parent culture, but also in the context of military discipline and military justice. What motivated women with the army to commit crimes, and did those crimes differ materially from offenses the same women might have committed in Britain?

Following the Drum is based on contemporary but not manuscript sources. Soldiers' wives had to be approached through male sources exclusively. No manuscripts by soldiers' wives survive and, indeed, there may have been none. According to Godfrey Davies, an historian of the Peninsular army, only one memoir exists written by an officer's wife about her experiences in Portugal. Anna Walker, wife of a brigadier wounded at Badajoz, did not, strictly speaking, follow the army on campaign. She had been in Lisbon only a short time when her husband was injured and she accompanied him home. The Walker manuscript is in the Wigan Central Public Library and could not be consulted.<sup>12</sup>

It may be argued that the project ought not to have been undertaken at all. Women should speak for themselves. When that is possible, I believe it to be the best approach to women's history, but some information is better than none. Because soldiers' wives form a small sub-class of working class wives and because considerable information on working-class women and their families in the early industrial period exists, that information could be used to provide a reasonable check on the attitudes of contemporary male observers. Approached from an understanding of working-class women's roles in the general culture, a study of soldiers' wives seemed feasible, and in that spirit the project was undertaken.

Examination of Matthews' British Autobiographies and British Diaries reveals that military memoirs, beginning about the middle of the eighteenth century, form a very large class of extant narratives of personal experience. It seems a pity that their use should be confined to one narrow category of history, for they contain a great deal of incidental observation of interest to social historians. The first advantage to the student of women's history forced back upon these sources is that a very large number of male sources minimizes the prejudices of any one writer, and the general problem of the male viewpoint becomes very clear. A second advantage, from the viewpoint of the researcher in Portland, Oregon, is that a great many of these memoirs saw print, and were therefore available on loan or to be found in centralized collections.

In deciding to consult contemporary print, rather than manuscript, sources, I was moved primarily by personal considerations of time and cost. The manuscripts of Peninsular memoirs are scattered throughout Britain, including Ireland, in private collections, county archives, public libraries and museums, and the museums of the regiments that served in the war. Seven manuscripts, to my knowledge, are deposited with the National Army Museum. The British Library, on the other hand, contains nearly all printed memoirs, more than seventy-five of them known to refer to women with the army, in one location. Had the scattered manuscripts been written by soldiers' wives, I would certainly have consulted them. As it was, I decided, perhaps wrongly, to consult print sources and, in part, to compensate for this drawback by consulting a great many print sources.

My conclusions, then, must be seen in the light of my sources.

I hope that a student with the leisure and income to trace the manuscripts will someday consult them and correct the deficiencies of this paper. I hope that that student will herself be British. An American has the slight advantage of distance on British values and customs, and the very great disadvantage of speaking a different language.

## CHAPTER I

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hugo Grotius, The Rights of War and Peace Including the Law of Nature and of Nations, ed. and trans., A. C. Campbell (London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), pp. 332-4, 359-71, 377, Frederick Bernays Wiener, Civilians under Military Justice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 7, 22, 189-92, Sir Charles W. C. Oman, Wellington's Army, 1809-1814 (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), p. 274, Susan Brownmiller, Against our Will, Men, Women and Rape (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 27-29. British soldiers' wives in the Peninsular War are discussed in a sympathetic but largely anecdotal manner in two modern military historians, Godfrey Davies, Wellington and his Army (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954) and Antony Brett-James, Life in Wellington's Army (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972). Without exception, the Peninsular memoirists regard the practice of taking soldiers' wives on campaign as normal, though not all approve of it.

<sup>2</sup>F. Wiener, Civilians under Military Justice, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup>G. R. Gleig, The Subaltern (London: William Blackwood, 1872), p. 7, William Lawrence, The Autobiography of Sgt. William Lawrence (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886), p. 17, Oman, Wellington's Army, p. 274, but see Davies, Wellington and his Army, p. 132, for actual figures of 1809 which were somewhat lower.

<sup>4</sup>The Narrative of the Life and Travels of Sgt. B (Edinburgh: David Brown, 1823), p. 36, hereafter abbreviated Sgt. B.; Oman, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>George Bell, Rough Notes of an Old Soldier (London: Day and Son, 1867), p. 63, F(rancis) S(eymour) Larpent, The Private Journal of F. S. Larpent, Sir George Larpent, ed., 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), I, 73-4, 54-5; Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington, The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, vols. 4-12, Col. Gurwood, ed. (London: John Murray, 1837), IV, 27, gives exact numbers of troops sailing to the Peninsula in 1808.

<sup>6</sup>Davies, Wellington and his Army, p. 132, W. H. Fitchett, Wellington's Men: Some Soldier Autobiographies (London: Smith Elder, 1912), p. 241. Although the Fitchett work contains a number of memoirs, only two, Sgt. James Anton and Rifleman John Harris,

deal with the women with the army. Hereafter citation of Fitchett will include the subject's name after the editor's, as Fitchett (Anton).

<sup>7</sup>F. Wiener, Civilians under Military Justice, p. 195.

<sup>8</sup>Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, pp. 241-3, Brownmiller, Against Our Will, p. 28n. and The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), entry for "campfollower." An entry for the modern meaning is dated 1876.

<sup>9</sup>Oman, Wellington's Army, p. 274.

<sup>10</sup>William Grattan, Adventures of the Connaught Rangers, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1847), II, 181, William Surtees, Twenty-five Years with the Rifle Brigade (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1833), pp. 100-1, Charles Steevens, Reminiscences of My Military Life (London: 1878), p. 71, Fitchett (Anton), loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850 (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969, rpt. of 1930 ed.), pp. 304-5.

<sup>12</sup>Davies, Wellington and his Army, p. 133.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WAR IN THE PENINSULA

The war conducted in the Iberian Peninsula and the south of France between 1807 and 1814 was secondary to the main drama of Napoleonic expansion on the Continent. British troops were sent to the Peninsula in 1808 with the dual aim of driving Marshal Junot from his occupation of Portugal, traditionally a British ally, and of giving encouragement to Spanish insurgents to resist the imposition of Joseph Bonaparte as king of Spain.<sup>13</sup>

In their first aim, the British army was almost immediately successful. Troops under Sir Arthur Wellesley defeated Junot at Vimeiro, north of Lisbon, a treaty was signed, and the French army evacuated Portugal. The treaty, the Convention of Cintra, was controversial, however, in both Lisbon and London, and Wellesley was recalled, leaving command of the army of about 30,000 to Sir John Moore.

Moore, conscious of the second aim of succoring the Spanish juntas, eventually marched into Spain by way of Ciudad Rodrigo, the north central border fortress between Spain and Portugal. He hoped to defeat the French armies in detail, that is, separately, before the massive forces available could be joined against him. Napoleon himself, however, took command of the French and forced Moore to retreat northward in some disorder to the Atlantic port of Coruña.



Moore fought a battle at Coruña, successfully protecting the embarkation of his army, but he was killed and his army had to abandon its guns, matériel and horses.

As with Dunkirk in World War II, this military disaster only served to stiffen British resolve. Public opinion favored continuing the war and Wellesley, whose performance at Vimeiro had been superb, whatever the defects of the treaty, was returned to Lisbon with fresh troops, while Moore's army was refitted for the Peninsular effort and the depleted regiments were brought back to strength.

Wellesley recaptured Oporto by surprise in May 1809, routing the French, marched rapidly southeast and combined with a Spanish army under Cuesta to defeat King Joseph at Talavera de la Reina in Spain. The Spanish proved unreliable allies, however, and Wellesley, now Viscount Wellington of Talavera, was forced to retreat into Portugal, abandoning his wounded. Supplies were very short and the army suffered much illness as a result. For some months Wellington kept up a defensive operation in the Portuguese border area while his engineers prepared a series of fortifications, the Lines of Torres Vedras, above Lisbon. Wellington meant to keep Portugal, and to protect his embarkation port and naval supply lines.

Finally in July 1810 a strong French force under Marshal Masséna invaded Portugal. Wellington directed the peasant militia to be called up, ordered the countryside stripped of food and forage and the population to move toward Lisbon, while he effected a leisurely withdrawal to his new lines of defense. He brought

Masséna to battle at Busaco on favorable ground and defeated the French, once again withdrawing at his leisure toward Lisbon. For six months Masséna's army, near starvation, sat before the Lines of Torres Vedras, unable to move forward. Finally, in March 1811, Masséna withdrew, pursued by the British army. Masséna's men, desperate for food and humiliated by the defeat at Busaco, sacked the Portuguese hinterland, indulging in excesses which provoked equally vicious reprisals from the angry Portuguese peasant militia.

A period of feinting extended through 1811 with Wellington still bent on the defensive aim of holding Portugal. Although two costly battles, Fuentes de Oñoro and Albuera, were fought successfully by the British, Wellington made no move against Spain.

In 1812, with Napoleon preoccupied in the east and withdrawing seasoned troops from Spain, Wellington decided to take the offensive. In January he besieged and stormed Ciudad Rodrigo. In April, after a costly assault, he took its sister fortress to the south, Badajoz. Both sieges were followed by the sack of the captured town. On the 22nd of July, the army fought a brilliant action at Salamanca in Spain, defeating a large French force in forty minutes. The victory at Salamanca enabled Wellington to drive eastward. In early August Madrid fell to his army and King Joseph fled with his civil government, but Wellington had overextended his supply lines and was short of specie to pay and provision his army. Unable to capture the crucial fortress at Burgos, despite costly assaults, Wellington withdrew in some disorder into Portugal. The British, however, still controlled the two key border fortresses,

and the army spent the winter well-supplied and safe in quarters near Freneda in north central Portugal.

In May 1813 Wellington moved his army rapidly north in a brilliant march, bypassing Burgos, and fell upon the main French force at Vitoria in northern Spain on June 21, 1813. The French, surprised and encumbered by the personnel and trappings of the civil government, were routed. They fled to the passes of the Pyrenees, leaving behind their artillery, horses, and supplies. King Joseph's baggage train which was laden with the spoils of six years' occupation of Spain was captured and looted by the British army. The French, under Marshal Soult, recovered rapidly, however, and counter-attacked through the passes of the Pyrenees in July and August. They were repelled, but at great cost. At the end of August, San Sebastián, which had been invested by Wellington after Vitoria, finally fell to the English. As at Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, the town was sacked.

On the 7th of October, 1813, Wellington's army crossed the Bidassoa into France, but it was not until the next month, after Pamplona finally fell, that his army pushed on into France. Fierce battles were fought in icy conditions--the Nivelle, the Nive, and, in February, Orthez--and the port of Bayonne was invested. By March, Napoleon, also harried from the east by the Austrians and Russians, was in grave difficulties. His regime began to crumble.

Marshal Soult, the southern commander, was stubbornly loyal, however, and on April 10, 1814, amid rumors of Napoleon's abdication, the costly battle of Toulouse was fought. Soult withdrew, Wellington

occupied Toulouse, and confirmation finally came of Napoleon's abdication. Even so, Bayonne refused the surrender and a sharp engagement was fought there on the 14th of April. Thereafter, hostilities ceased. The Peninsular War was over and the army dispersed, some regiments to England and many to America where the War of 1812 had yet to run its course.

From the viewpoint of soldiers' wives with the army on campaign, the most dramatic and harrassing events were the three retreats--to Coruña in the winter of 1808-9, from Talavera to Portugal in the summer of 1809, and from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo and eastern Portugal in the autumn of 1812. "Highpoints" of plunder occurred in the sack of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz and in the capture of King Joseph's baggage train. In the course of the war women walked the length and breadth of Portugal, made long treks into Spain, and finally, climbed the Pyrenees and crossed into the icy mud of southern France to a land as yet unplundered and prosperous. The incessant atrocities of guerrilla warfare, fortunately not directed against the British but witnessed by them, form the somber background for all the events of an eventful six years.

## CHAPTER II

### ENDNOTES

<sup>13</sup> This chapter is designed to present a chronology of events and basic geography of the war. The best early account is Sir William F. P. Napier's A History of the War in the Peninsula, abr. by Charles Stuart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Napier was a participant. For the British army, the standard source is Sir John W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, vols. 3-10 (London: Macmillan, 1906-20). Sir Charles Oman's massive History of the Peninsular War, though scholarly, proved useless for my purposes. His Wellington's Army (cited above) was consulted. More recent works are Michael Glover, The Peninsular War: 1807-1814, A Concise Military History (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1974), Jac Weller, Wellington in the Peninsula, 1808-1814 (New York: Modern Literary Editions, 1962), and two biographies of Wellington, S. G. P. Ward, Wellington (New York: Arco Pub., 1964) and Elizabeth Longford, Wellington: the Years of the Sword (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). Glover's Legacy of Glory, the Bonaparte Kingdom of Spain (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971) and Owen Connelly, Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms (New York: Free Press, 1965) give good background for Spanish opposition to Joseph Bonaparte.

### CHAPTER III

#### WIVES AND MISTRESSES

Soldiers' wives were wives in the traditional working-class pattern, but wifeliness took on odd, dramatic forms in the context of war. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to establish these women's motivations for following their husbands' regiments on campaign, and to describe the attributes of wifeliness as manifested in action. The question of motivation had to be approached obliquely. The method of selecting some soldiers' wives to sail with the regiments could be described and the mode of selection set against the economic plight of wives left behind. Because direct evidence is scanty, however, the socio-economic background of soldiers' wives had to be derived, first, from the process of recruiting soldiers for the regular army, and, second, from the general pattern of rootlessness in early industrial society. Once the background was clarified, the economic motivation emerged clearly. Pride of regiment, intense in the wives as well as their husbands, could then be seen as a response to the condition of rootlessness and as a further element, beyond the economic motive, in the wives' eagerness to follow the regiment abroad.<sup>14</sup>

The meanings of wifeliness in the context of war could then be examined. Sexual fidelity, a major attribute, had to be set, first, within the limits imposed by the women's poverty, and,

second, in the context of the wife's legal status as feme covert, that is, as essentially the husband's property. Task-oriented service to the husband, a second major component of wifeliness, could then be seen as a response to the problem of other-directed identity. The special case of officers' wives, for whom economic need was a diminished motive, was best examined in the lives of two women. Again, serviceability and fidelity emerged as ingredients of their idea of wifeliness, but other motives for following the army, notably adventurousness, also appeared. The improbability of women with the army, however adventurous, achieving independent identity in war suggested itself as a limit of self-directed action. Finally, the positive consequences of fidelity and service to the husband could be described and contrasted with army-imposed limits to the husband's role as protector.

Women allowed to go abroad with a regiment were chosen by lottery. The nature of the lottery varied from one regiment to another, but there was always some kind of preselection. Gleig suggests that six women per company were selected "by lot out of the most highly respected of the whole band."<sup>15</sup> Who decided which women were respected is not specified. It is likely that respected meant married. Sgt. Anton reports that the choice fell, as a rule, upon useful women without children. Sgt. Stevenson's regiment, setting out for Egypt six years before the Peninsular War, gave the preference to women who would be useful to the regiment, either as nurses or as officers' laundresses.<sup>16</sup>

The lottery was deferred until the evening before the regiment was due to sail, a fact which reveals the defencelessness of these

families in the face of policy. The suspense was itself a tradition, however, and there were reasons for it. Sgt. Anton's explanation is that the decision was so painful to company commanders they put it off until the last moment. While it no doubt was painful to captains--and colonels--to separate families, more practical motives for delaying the choice also suggest themselves. The morale of most married soldiers cannot have been greatly improved by knowing that they were to be abruptly divorced from wives and children, and too great a time to reflect on their misfortune would have increased the likelihood of desertion before the transports sailed. As it was, the good luck of the few was resented by those whose wives were left behind. If that rancor had been allowed to fester for any length of time the result would have been damaging to the discipline of the troops once they reached Portugal. Indeed, Anton comments on the continued feelings of resentment among the bereft men and other sources cite specific instances of despair and bad conduct of husbands whose families were left behind. Lengthy brooding could only have worsened matters.<sup>17</sup>

One interpretation of the delay in deciding which wives would be chosen to go seems farfetched--"the humane design of leaving to each woman, as long as it can be left, the enjoyment of that greatest of all earthly blessings, hope."<sup>18</sup> Although individual company commanders were no doubt compassionate men, it is a little difficult to see how prolonging a painful suspense for months could be piously construed. In any case the delay was traditional, not a choice of individual captains.



The scene of parting appalled observers. Even Sgt. Lawrence, not a sentimental man and unwed at the time he first witnessed an embarkation, says it was "dreadful."<sup>19</sup> Captain Patterson also described the embarkation:

It was indeed most affecting to witness the distress of those whose fate it was to remain behind, and the despair that was pictured on the countenances of the unhappy creatures was truly pitiable.--Many of them, young, helpless, and unprotected, were forced to wander back to their own country, penniless, and broken-hearted, and to all intents and purposes left in a widowed state, for few of them were fated ever to behold their husbands again.<sup>20</sup>

Lest this scene seem too highly colored, it would be well to consider the plight of the abandoned families. Not only were such partings painful emotionally, but the women were left in an unfortunate economic position, for the regular army paid no family allowances at all and took no formal responsibility for dependents of soldiers sent abroad. Other sources also compare the women left behind to widows.<sup>21</sup> That is a good analogy in some respects.

Men enlisted in the regular army either for life, or, after the reforms of 1806, for seven years, and regiments posted abroad often remained in foreign stations for as long as twenty years. Many Peninsular regiments at the close of the war were sent directly to America, where the War of 1812 still dragged on, without so much as touching an English or Irish port. In some stations (the West Indies, for example) the death rate among new arrivals exceeded fifty percent. Despite a shooting war, the Peninsular posting was not that dangerous, but soldiers of regiments which stayed in Portugal and Spain for the duration of the war stood a

high chance of being killed or dying of disease. Thus real widowhood was not unlikely for the women left behind.<sup>22</sup>

In an economic sense, widowhood might have been preferable to being left. A widow can remarry, and the government did provide small pensions for the widows of dead soldiers.<sup>23</sup> The wife left behind had no such recourse. She could find work to support herself and her children, or she could seek poor relief. There were drawbacks to both alternatives.

In England the wife could apply to her home parish for poor relief--after she had made her way there, often a considerable distance from the embarkation port, with her children, if any. No formal allowance was given to the woman to help her on her journey, though local parishes might choose to assist her to return home, or the regiment might have raised charity funds for that purpose. As women who married soldiers had often been cast off by their own families for doing so, the social consequences of returning home must have been as unpleasant as the economic. In Ireland there was no system of poor relief. If the woman could not find work she became a beggar.<sup>24</sup>

The adjective "helpless", however, would not apply to all of the women left behind. The work opportunities for English (not Irish) women in general were fairly wide, including industrial labor. In garrison the living standard of soldiers' families was comparable to that of agricultural laborers, for they received minimal housing and rations. A private soldier was lucky to clear eighteen shillings cash a year from his pay, after stoppages, however.

Thus it is highly probable that the soldier's wife had worked all along for wages, most often in some kind of domestic or semi-domestic service.<sup>25</sup> Wives in domestic service, if they were able to return to the garrison town, may have continued in their former employment.

For the wife who was left behind with a family, agricultural labor would have been economically marginal. The most common wage of a male agricultural laborer, 8-10 shillings a week, barely sufficed to maintain subsistence for a family of four and had to be supplemented by the earnings of wife and children. Women and children received lower wages than men in all areas of employment, including agriculture. Domestic work was less often available to women with children, also, so that the wife burdened with young children was more likely to require poor relief than childless wives. Finally, the embarkation ports were universally in the south where employment in manufacturing was not available to the women and children. In any case, whatever her fortune in seeking work, the wife left behind took a substantial and immediate cut in her living standard, for she and her children no longer received rations and housing free.<sup>26</sup>

Women left behind may have preferred to return to the regiment's headquarters town rather than their home parishes; at least Sgt. Stevenson's wife and the other women of his regiment did so. They were known there and may have found or returned to work. There they supplied one another with emotional support, news, and in some cases, wild rumors. There they were able to receive

mail from their husbands, or from literate friends of their husbands, sometimes including a portion of their husbands' pay or other moneys acquired abroad. Although some soldiers regularly sent what they could home for the support of their families, there was no formal, official machinery for doing so, and it must have been easy for a soldier abroad to forget his responsibility to his family.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the sources deplore the injustice done to soldiers' families, but only two suggest remedies--Sgt. Anton and Lord Wellington. Sgt. Anton's plan is very modest. He suggests that no women be allowed to go abroad because of the unfairness to the ones left behind and that the normal ration allotted women and children accompanying the army be given instead to dependents at home. ". . . although this is a very trifling allowance, would it not be much better to give it to those of good character who are not permitted to follow their husbands?"<sup>28</sup>

Wellington's suggestions were more elaborate. In 1811 Wellington, concerned about recruiting, pointed out to the army administration that family allowances were given to the militia, a home-based force, but not to regular soldiers. "This is an inconsistency that must strike the mind of even the least reflecting of mankind," he remarked drily. "What is the consequence? That none but the worst description of men enter the regular service."<sup>29</sup> The effects were particularly marked in Ireland where he had had governmental experience.

Writing to Lord Bathurst in 1813, Wellington enlarged upon his point:

When I was in office in Ireland, I had an opportunity of knowing that the women took the utmost pains to prevent the men from volunteering to serve in the line, and from enlisting; naturally enough, because from that moment they went not upon the parish, but upon the dung hill to starve. Indeed it is astonishing that any Irish militia soldier was ever found to volunteer; and they must be certainly the very worst members of society; and I have often been induced to attribute the frequency and enormity of the crimes committed by the soldiers to our having so many men who must have left their families to starve for the inducement of a few guineas to get drunk. A provision, however, for the wives and children of the soldiers will probably revive the spirit of volunteering,<sup>30</sup> and we shall get better men than we have at present.

The government objected to allowances because the cost would be excessive. Relative to the golden years of peace, the propertied classes were suffering under a tax burden, so the political climate for such schemes was not propitious. Wellington addressed the issue of cost:

. . . if the expense of double bounties is considered the expense of bounties to deserters, and the enormous expense of bounties for substitutes, I doubt that the expense would be found to exceed that incurred at present. But why incur the expense for the families of militia men? Why not stop the expense for all soldiers enlisted in the militia after a certain time, and incur it for the regular army? Would not this, saving go far to cover the expense to be incurred?<sup>31</sup>

This proposition, though unfair to the dependents of militiamen, seems reasonable from the viewpoint of recruiting for the regular army. In any case, it was fruitless. The government would do nothing to correct the evil.

The women who followed the army to Portugal in 1808, then, were eager to do so, but their eagerness must be set in the context of the alternatives that faced them. By the luck of the draw, they-- and their children--escaped probable pauperdom. The most

optimistic and ignorant among them must have realized that following the army was a risky undertaking. They would be issued a ration and have access to their husbands' pay, but they would also be subject to the conditions of an army on the move and to the alien climate and customs of their destination. It speaks eloquently of the appalling situation of those left behind that those chosen were envied and themselves wished to go.

At this point it would be helpful to know more of the socio-economic background of the women with the army. Unfortunately direct evidence of the women's background is scanty. The question can best be pursued by examination of the process of recruiting men for regiments of the line.

British soldiers, unlike the French, were not conscripts. They were drawn from a much narrower social range, despite the practice in both armies of buying substitutes or buying out. Members of the militia were conscripted, or balloted, in the contemporary term, but when the regular army began to try to fill its depleted ranks from the militia, it still had to offer the militiaman inducement to volunteer. He could not be drafted into a regiment of the line against his will, though considerable social coercion was exercised in some cases.<sup>32</sup>

Appeals to patriotism, or to the desire for glory which is not the same thing, were routinely made. One purpose of the splendor of military uniforms--and they were, even in ordinary infantry regiments, quite beautiful--was to create ambulatory recruiting posters. The soldiers looked glorious and must have appealed to the

out-at-elbow and the frivolous-minded for that reason.<sup>33</sup> Part of a recruiting sergeant's patter was to extoll his regiment's glorious record in the field and to sell the gullible on the excitement of a soldier's life. The combination of patriotism and glory was insufficient, however, to fill the ranks.

Several negative factors--apart from danger, which was downplayed--operated to prevent an enthusiastic rush to volunteer. The army had never been a popular force. It was used at home for police purposes and the practice of quartering soldiers on the populace--though largely discontinued after wartime construction of barracks in strategic locations--had bred durable hostility. Folk memories of the interference of Cromwell's army with Parliament and with people's everyday lives no doubt also contributed to popular dislike. Certainly the general aversion to a standing army was not just an attitude of the enfranchised elite, but a popular sentiment. So greatly was army intimidation of voters feared that troops garrisoned there were moved from county towns at election time to soothe the electorate. French enthusiasm for things military did not cross the Channel.<sup>34</sup>

The Royal Navy enjoyed considerable glamor (though the glamor did not make gathering crews easier), but the army, at the beginning of the Peninsular War, enjoyed a reputation for little but bumbling defeat. The victories of that war (Talavera, Salamanca, and Vitoria, notably) were popularly acclaimed and may have helped recruiting somewhat. On the whole, however, the potential soldier required something more tangible than glory as an inducement to volunteer--to wit, drink and money.

Wellington alludes to Irish soldiers enlisting for a few guineas to get drunk on. What he does not mention is the recruiters' standard practice of plying their quarry with drink prior to enlistment. In many cases the soldier did not enlist for the prospect of drink; he enlisted when he was drunk. Full of camaraderie, beguiled by the sergeant's tales of glory and flattered by his attention, the fuddled victim made his intention clear before witnesses, took the king's shilling, and was "gone for a soldier." Quite a few wives must have been waiting for their husbands to come home from the gin mill or pub or fair and received an unpleasant surprise when the spouse sobered up enough to discover--and report--what he had done. At that point, if the family could not buy a substitute, it became attached to the army, and, if the regiment were sent overseas, subject to the wives' lottery.<sup>35</sup>

There were limits to what the army would accept in the way of recruits. Minimum size, age, health, sanity, and intelligence were considered before a recruit was accepted, though the army decided to raise a training regiment of boys, orphans of soldiers taken from parish workhouses.<sup>36</sup>

Until 1806 soldiers enlisted for life. A long-term enlistee in one of the Household regiments might be a settled family man before he saw action, sometimes a man of middle-age, and then the physical shock of the change of scene was as likely to kill him as enemy musketballs. After 1806, as an inducement to recruiting, a seven year enlistment was allowed, so some Peninsular soldiers were married men with grandchildren, while others, drawn from the



militia, were young men with some sense of the future. Some balloted militiamen, a wider social group, were willing to make seven year commitments. Although as a group, the militia had a high proportion of married men, relatively few of the married ones volunteered for regiments of the line.<sup>37</sup>

Recruiting was an expensive business. Official bounties offered for enlisting in the regular army went as high as sixteen guineas, though by 1809 ten guineas was the official fee. That was a very large sum from the viewpoint of a poor man, and, when multiplied by 35,000, the maximum size of the English army in the Peninsula, a very large sum by anyone's standards. Substitutes were given substantially more. Morris records a man of his regiment who cleared his parents' debts by accepting £60 to substitute for a prosperous farmer's son balloted to the militia. When the young man then enlisted from the militia into a line regiment he received a government bounty of twelve guineas as well. A bounty is only a flat sum, however, not an income, and the rate of pay of the ordinary soldier, though higher than it had been at the beginning of the French wars, was still low. There was also the lack of family allowances to consider. Who, then, could be induced to enlist under such circumstances?<sup>38</sup>

Men who enlisted were often feckless, drunk, or desperate. Rootless or uprooted people, they and their wives belonged to a segment of the laboring classes to whom low social status, low pay, the unappealing conditions of military discipline and barracks life, and the threat of foreign posting would seem tolerable. Wellington's

"scum of the earth" indictment of his men, though unappetizingly phrased, probably held more than a grain of truth.<sup>39</sup>

"Respectable" families, that is, those with a relatively secure economic or social position in a community, did not want their daughters to marry soldiers. Susan Sibbald chronicles her maid-servant's on-again off-again engagement to a soldier of Col. Sibbald's regiment. The young woman was finally persuaded by her family to give the man up and Mrs. Sibbald records that the maid eventually married a baker. The fact that the maid gave the soldier up is less interesting than that her father, a small tradesman, vehemently objected to the connection for his daughter, and that Mrs. Sibbald, herself the wife of a military man, agreed with the father's judgment and rejoiced in the maid's ultimate choice of marriage partner.<sup>40</sup>

Among the poorer members of the laboring classes at this time, the degree of mobility, or rootlessness, began to be marked, despite the parish-bound system of poor relief. This rootlessness, a factor in enlistment, had several causes.

In rural England, particularly in the south, the old peasant prudence with regard to marriage with giving way to slacker and younger arrangements. Parliamentary enclosure of common lands accelerated at this time, divorcing many cottagers from attachment to the land, and the Speenhamland System of outdoor poor relief, though not universal even in England, favored families over the unmarried, further increasing the number of rootless laborers. These conditions, taken together over time, produced men and women

with weakened ties to their home villages, weakened loyalties to their work, a tolerance for subsistence living, and the state of mind in which mobility is not out of the question. If a crisis occurred (in employment, housing, or the less tangible area of personal relationships), a villager was more likely than ever to pick up stakes and leave. Picking up and leaving might mean for a man enlisting in the army directly, or emigrating to a market town or to one of the new factory towns of the north where any temporary lack of opportunity could also drive him to enlist.<sup>41</sup>

A similarly rootless rural woman would be more likely to find marriage to a soldier appealing than her more prosperous and settled sister in a skilled trade, a secure position in service, or a more traditional, place-bound rural family. In urban industrial towns the rootlessness was endemic. A lay-off of factory hands for any reason would increase enlistments if the period of unemployment were apt to continue for long. Though poor relief was still tied to the parish-of-origin, going home would have been difficult and humiliating to new emigrants. Going with the recruiting sergeant was a quicker form of "relief."

The majority of English soldiers--and probably of Scots soldiers--were not married when they enlisted, though several years in a garrison town increased the likelihood that they would marry. Of Irish soldiers, Wellington alludes to their custom of marrying young, one implication being that they were more likely to bring wives to their regiment than other soldiers.<sup>42</sup> Although age at marriage was also declining in England, references to soldiers' wives in the

Peninsula seem to indicate a large number of Irishwomen. There may have been a disproportion of married Irish soldiers. Probably there was a disproportion of Irish soldiers period.

Ireland, because of the lack of alternatives to agricultural work, because of its potato-based population boom, because of the dislocations of the 1798 rebellion and the subsequent disturbances, because of the very large number of regiments on the Irish establishment, was fertile ground for recruiting.

As an alternative to farm labor or work in a mill, the army was not very attractive. As an alternative to starvation (the lack of poor relief in Ireland has been mentioned), it was apt to seem relatively appealing, even to men with wives. There also seems to have been no comparable social stigma attached to soldiering in Ireland. A Scots soldier noticed that Irish peasant families were kinder to passing soldiers than people in England had been. He attributed the fact to the probability that Irish families had kinsmen serving in the army.<sup>43</sup> A traditional, preindustrial society is probably more accommodating to the idea of the military as a profession than an industrializing society which offers wider, more complex choices of employment.

Once in the army, soldiers and their wives, whether English, Scots, or Irish, developed a curious variation on the sense of place. They became attached to the regiment itself as their parents and grandparents had been attached to rural villages. An officer was likely to move from one regiment to another in the course of

promotion. A soldier might move from the second (or home-based) battalion of his regiment to the first, but he very rarely moved from one regiment to another.<sup>44</sup> From the soldier's viewpoint the regiment gave him a larger identity, a piece of public history, and a home. He repaid it with a fierce loyalty. This pride of regiment was also shared in full by soldiers' wives, and may have been a further element in the wives' eagerness to follow the regiment abroad. They, too, "belonged" to the 95th or the 88th, the 51st or the Buffs. They were the Wives of the Regiment.<sup>45</sup>

It cannot be denied that marrying a soldier must have required some degree of optimism, desperation, defiance of convention, recklessness, or possibly stupidity. Many soldiers' wives were in the position of having little to lose in the first place. They were, however, wives--that is to say, either women formally married in the eyes of the state, the Anglican or Presbyterian church, and the colonel of the regiment, or women whose liaisons with soldiers were of such long standing as to make them indistinguishable from wives in the eyes of observers. The army transported only "respectable" women at its expense and private soldiers were unlikely to be able to pay passage for other women.<sup>46</sup> A certain number of British prostitutes probably did make their way to Portugal and some officers had the wherewithal and the inclination to pay passage for mistresses, but the British women on the roster of a regiment were wives of soldiers.

Once the army reached Portugal this core of sixty or seventy married women with the baggage train of the regiment was gradually

augmented by Portuguese and Spanish women who formed liaisons with soldiers and officers. Some married their "protectors." The Portuguese and Spanish also valued formal marriage, although marriage to a "heretic" (in the case of most English and Scots, if not Irish, soldiers) was not considered a good thing.<sup>47</sup> The economic dislocations in the Peninsula, however, also created a multitude of women for whom the alternative to living as a British soldier's mistress was starvation. Thus a British woman with the army was much more likely to be formally married to a soldier than a Portuguese or Spanish follower was.

A question arises as to who performed marriages in the Peninsular army when there were no Anglican chaplains at hand, and there rarely were. Officers as well as soldiers married in the course of the war. Possibly colonels, like captains of ships, were empowered to conduct marriages. They did exercise other religious functions and Thomas Bunbury, a captain at the time, recalled performing the Anglican burial service for a fellow officer's wife.<sup>48</sup>

If a soldier were married by a Roman Catholic priest in the Peninsula--the most likely situation--was the marriage a marriage? Roman Catholic marriage was not recognized in British law, a fact that caused great resentment in Ireland. If this legal ambiguity extended to the army in the Peninsula, then the strange "divorce" the army performed at the end of the war of British soldiers from their Spanish and Portuguese wives explains itself. The Catholic ceremony would have satisfied the women at the time of marriage. The legal quibble would have given the army an excuse, however,

to refuse to transport the women "home" to England when the time came.

A number of sources describe the general dismay and grief when these Portuguese and Spanish women and their children were sent packing. Costello records soldiers deserting to join their families. Many of these women were not married, of course, but several sources use the phrase "wives and followers" to describe them, indicating that at least some of them were married or perceived as wives.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the Portuguese and Spanish women who followed the army behaved toward their consorts as if they were wives and, indeed, the general impression of camp followers, formed against expectation, is that observers saw most of them as wives. They are never seen as professional prostitutes, and rarely as mistresses, in the memoirs. A great deal of casual sex took place whenever the army passed through settled areas, but this thesis deals with the women in the baggage train, women for whom rations were issued. If they were British, they were probably wives and behaved as the parent culture expected wives to behave. Even August Schaumann, a man inclined to boast of his sexual exploits, concedes that the wives of British soldiers were notable for their fidelity to their husbands.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, sexual fidelity appears to have been a major component of wifeliness. There were limits to fidelity, however, deriving from the women's poverty.

The army defined wives, first, in terms of consumption, the burden they placed on the commissariat. To the army, a wife was a

half ration. "The women and children of the officers and soldiers of the army are entitled, the former each to half a ration, the latter to a quarter of a ration daily. . . ." <sup>51</sup> The idea of growing children being given only a quarter the nourishment of their adult fathers is depressing. As for the adult women, they were smaller than the men as a rule and probably did require less food to sustain activity--except when they were pregnant or nursing babies--but few women are half the size of their husbands.

The full ration was inadequate to sustain activity for long. It had to be supplemented, even for the soldiers. Wives and children, then, must have required substantial additions to the ration to maintain health and activity. The women with the army were not expected to carry a sixty-pound pack and a musket, nor were they expected to fight. They were expected to keep up with the line of march, however--generally fifteen to twenty miles a day in decent weather. The Light Division under Craufurd once covered fifty miles in twenty-five hours at the quick march, but it is not recorded that their wives followed them at that pace. Often wives were expected to carry a twenty-pound child and the family possessions. <sup>52</sup>

As a direct response to the ration policy which defined them as half of their husbands, women sought mobility. Army regulations forbade them to ride in the baggage carts, so many acquired donkeys. The donkeys allowed them to ride instead of marching and to range farther into the countryside in search of food to supplement the ration. <sup>53</sup>

The army, not unnaturally, found the animals an impediment to movement and a burden to the commissariat which did not provide



fodder for them but which had to compete with the women in finding forage. Bell and Grattan record that the provost marshal shot donkeys belonging to the women of their regiments in the retreat from Burgos. As the retreating army was closely pursued by the French cavalry, the provost marshal may be forgiven for taking drastic steps to clear the road, but there is no record of commissariat mules or artillery mules being shot out of hand, unless they were already expiring, which these donkeys were not.<sup>54</sup> The point is that the women were with the army but not entirely of it, as far as the army was concerned. If property had to be destroyed, their was next most vulnerable to that of civilian bystanders. Their status then, even when they were listed on the roster of a company and eligible for rations, was vulnerable.

After the battle of Talavera (July 1809) the army found itself near starvation because promised Spanish supplies had not been delivered.

We are starving, our men falling sick, and we have nothing to give them in the way of comfort for their recovery; and our horses are dying by hundreds in the week. We have not had a full ration of provisions since the 22nd of the last month; and I am convinced that in that time the men have not received ten days' bread. . . .<sup>55</sup>

"The last month" was July and the letter is dated 15 August. The women, dependent to a large extent on the ration issue, were also starving.

Part of the difficulty of supply was that the Spanish peasants could not be persuaded to sell their good to the commissaries in adequate quantities at a reasonable price. Money intended for the paymaster's chest had to be expended for the commissariat, so that the

men (the officers as well) were soon in arrears of their pay. For the women, this meant that they did not receive the usual ration for themselves and their children, and also that most had no money to buy food, though it was available in some places. To increase the women's misery, Wellington issued general orders forbidding women with the army to buy bread within two leagues of a commissariat depot. In their already weakened condition, then, they had to range very far afield to buy bread, and they often had nothing to buy it with.<sup>56</sup>

It was at this juncture that Schaumann observed soldiers' wives engaged in a kind of prostitution.

The soldiers' wives, who as a rule went about decently clad, and were most faithful to their husbands, now rode round hungrily in rags on starved donkeys, and gave themselves to anyone<sup>57</sup> who wanted them in exchange for half a loaf of bread.

As Schaumann was not above using his position as commissary to bribe potential sexual partners, that is a fairly remarkable statement. Sgt. Donaldson indicates that the period after Talavera was not the only time when hunger forced soldiers' wives to sell their favors, a fact he regards with sympathy for the women and contempt for the commissaries.<sup>58</sup>

It is not possible to determine whether the wives of soldiers were faithful to their husbands under normal conditions. What can be said is that observers expected them to be, and that incidents of wifely infidelity were reported as unusual. Sexual fidelity may be taken as a major attribute of wifeliness, as observers defined the role.

One sensational episode of infidelity reported by Surtees and Costello reveals further assumptions about women as wives, for the

infidelity was punished by death. The wife of a soldier of another regiment had taken up with a sergeant of Rifles, passing as the sergeant's wife. Her husband came up to her and tried to persuade her to return to him. When she would not, he asked her how she could desert her child. Even that failed to persuade her, so the husband took up his weapon and ran her through with his bayonet. He was sentenced to three months' confinement but released after a month to rejoin his regiment. Although this episode is reported with shocked relish, there is no sense in the two accounts that the man should have been hung, the normal punishment for murder. Other instances occur in which the murder of a women was punished relatively lightly.<sup>59</sup>

The episode of the soldier who killed his unfaithful wife ought to be set against the instance described by Schaumann of a dragoon who sold his wife. Her maiden name was Anne Luke, Schaumann reports, and the commissary who bought her felt obliged to reward the husband with a solatium, that is "a sum of money paid, over and above the actual damages, as solace for injured feelings."<sup>60</sup> Schaumann comments that Anne Luke was too beautiful and ladylike to be wasted on an ordinary soldier, but the dragoon did deserve some consideration for his complaisance in giving her up. She eventually married a commissary-general.<sup>61</sup>

Both of these episodes related to the legal concept, of which vestiges still exist in common law, of the husband's right of property in a wife. The feme covert or married women was not only subsumed in her husband's legal identity, her chastity was in the

strict sense her husband's possession. He could be compensated for its loss, as if his cattle had been houghed or his horse stolen. The wife's body was not hers to dispose of.<sup>62</sup>

This period reflects deep respect for all private property, even that belonging to relatively powerless men; as may be seen in the careful justice of awards for customary grazing rights made in cases of parliamentary enclosure. In the Peninsular memoirs, the strength of the principle may be measured in the severity with which crimes of soldiers against property were punished, in the general disgust at vandalism committed by soldiers who were freezing or starving for want of fuel, and in the intense fury Wellington repeatedly expressed in the Dispatches when recounting acts of pillage.<sup>63</sup> If a wife were a man's property then perhaps he had a right to dispose of her or destroy her--not a legal right, but a felt, psychological right.

Women probably accepted some palatable version of the wife-as-property definition of wifeliness. Of their self-concept of wife there is no direct testimony, except that of Susan Sibbald who was never asked to follow the army campaigning, although she and her children did sail with her husband's regiment to the Channel Isles at a time when a hostile army lay only a few miles distant. Mrs. Sibbald, who belonged to a comfortable gentry family, had thrown in her lot with her husband, not vice versa, and her duty required her to be with him. Her place was with him.<sup>64</sup>

This traditional, Ruth-like attitude seems to have been embraced more fervently in the case of soldiers' wives than officers' wives,

probably because of the economic reinforcement already described. Other-directed identity goes a long way toward explaining the grief of the women left at home (their terror may be laid to economics). Whatever their husbands' qualities as lovers and providers, these women were losing a substantial piece of their own identity; they were defined at law, and probably defined themselves, in relation to their husbands. It was possible for some of the English women among them to earn a bare living as servants or factory hands, but they were no longer either feme sole, the spinster defined by her skill, nor feme covert, the wife defined by her husband. They were ghosts. The women who followed the army, whatever her privations, retained dignity and identity as a wife.

The titles of respect accorded women with the army reveal an interesting hierarchy, for Mrs. was not yet a general courtesy extended to all married women. Their marriage was signalled only by taking their husbands' surnames. Some of the women appearing in the memoirs are referred to only by nickname and surname, as with Jenny Bates and Nelly Carsons. When a woman attained some unspecified level of dignity, perhaps of years, she became Mother Pegg or Mother Skiddy, a title not bestowed for mere maternity. The wives of sergeants, however, were Mrs., as in the case of Mrs. Reston, a heroine of the siege of Cádiz. Dan Carsons, William Grattan's bâtmán, was always careful to refer to his sister, a sergeant-major's wife, as Mrs. O'Neil, even after a spell of melancholia dimmed her usual force of personality. One soldier records with resentment that his sergeant's wife treated recruits in

barracks like servants, so the hierarchy of respect (or dominance) was already in place before the army reached Portugal. An officer's wife was, of course, Mrs. Smith, unless the husband won or already had a title, at which point she became Lady Smith.<sup>65</sup>

Officers' wives, less strongly motivated to follow their husbands for economic reasons, had high status among the wives, but, as ladies, they form a distinctly special case of wifely devotion, with the added impulse to adventure. Instances of officers' wives showing an emotional need similar to that of soldiers' wives to be near their husbands exist, though they are not numerous. Col. Lejeune, a French prisoner, provides an often-quoted portrait of an English captain's family on the march, complete with donkey, servants, infant, and umbrella, but there is no similar cameo in English sources.<sup>66</sup> Although they were not as numerous as soldiers' wives, officers' wives received considerable mention in the sources. Two of them, Susanna Dalbiac and Juana Smith, figure prominently.

Mrs. Dalbiac was a friend of General Long's sister and acquainted with Susan Sibbald. She apparently refused to be left behind when her husband, a colonel, was posted to the Peninsular army.

Your nice little friend Mrs. Dalbiac is always by the side of her husband, whether lying under the canopy of Heaven or enjoying the blessings and shelter of a roof. I am surprised how she has been able to stand the trial without injury to her health, but really, of the two, she is the stoutest. I wished to do almost more than is in my power to lighten the burden her affection has imposed upon her, but no, she is inexorable, and rejects prayer, petition or remonstrance. Sincerely do I wish them both a safe return to their own fireside to enjoy as they ought<sup>67</sup> the inestimable reward of such fidelity and attachment!

The most vivid account of Mrs. Dalbiac shows her searching among the dead and wounded for her husband after the battle of Salamanca. She seems to have kept a strong sense of family at all times and her husband's nephew records that he would have died of malaria on one occasion if his Aunt Susan had not nursed him devotedly. Thus her sense of duty extended not only to her husband, but to her husband's kin as well. Col. Dalbiac appreciated his wife's devotion, but the hardships (despite Long's sanguine diagnosis) apparently broke her health, for she predeceased her husband by some years.<sup>68</sup> She may be taken as an instance of wifely serviceability, extended, in her case, beyond her husband.

Juana Smith, being Spanish, is a special case.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps it is as well that the memoir was written by her husband, for her values and attitudes would otherwise lie outside the scope of the paper. Harry Smith's expectations with regard to wifeliness and his evaluation of his wife's conduct are worth examining. He was a very romantic young man of middle-class origins--his father was a country doctor--and his memoirs, written in high romantic style, include a substantial section dealing with his wife's experiences with the army.

Indeed, so much of the narrative dealing with the war, from 1812 after the siege of Badajoz, where they first met, to the end is from Juana's viewpoint (in a third-person novelistic sense) that Smith must have consulted her extensively. The relative sparseness of detail in the earlier sections suggests her collaboration, though the style of writing is consistently his.

Juana Smith's story is the most thoroughly detailed extant account of an English officer's wife following the Peninsular army.

Smith's conception of his wife's role shows some interesting expectations and judgments. Most significantly, his wife was at no time to interfere with his duty or even to question it. His marriage was definitely subordinate to his duty. Smith consigned Juana to the protection of his servant and a soldier's wife whom he hired for Juana as maid and dueña. They were to protect and advise Juana on the march or in the rear of an action so that Smith would not have to. He felt some anxiety for his wife, certainly, but he expected her entourage to fend for itself.<sup>70</sup>

Smith also expected his wife to play the role of hostess, a role not assigned to soldiers' wives. He liked to show Juana off. He enjoyed having a wife other men admired, and he even enjoyed her colorful displays of jealousy. In a formal sense, what he wanted was a consort who could charm his superiors and make his friends comfortable, and Juana did so, apparently without effort, in trying circumstances. The hostess role seems to have been expected to most officers' wives.<sup>71</sup>

Physical endurance and courage were further expectations. Smith admired his wife's daring, a startling fact until one remembers that the idea of helpless ladies was not yet firmly in place and, in any case, Smith was not gentry. The anecdotal material shows Juana Smith in action, so to speak--riding her powerful horse with her foot broken, attempting to ford dangerous streams, overcoming her terror of heights and her terror of English society. Smith,



within limits, gave his wife considerable independence of movement, independence which was probably necessary in the circumstances but which he appears to have considered normal and natural.<sup>72</sup>

Smith expected to act as his wife's mentor, not surprisingly when one discovers that Juana was fourteen when they married and Smith ten years older. In their case the age discrepancy was fortuitous, but officers were often married to much younger women. Susan Sibbald details the case of a nineteen-year-old girl married to a morose, forty-year-old officer. Poor men could rarely afford to marry until they reached the rank of captain, and many did not consider marriage until they were majors or lieutenant colonels. Thus the teacher-pupil relationship was probably inevitable. One thing Smith did not teach his wife, however, was the English language. Although Smith spoke fluent Spanish, the language barrier between Juana and his brother-officers still seems odd. She was very often the only lady at brigade headquarters with many eager tutors to help her. Perhaps he regarded the language barrier as a safeguard of his interests.<sup>73</sup>

What may be deduced of Juana Smith's attitudes? Probably the most striking impression is that she enjoyed campaigning. She enjoyed it so much she continued to follow the army, with the brief exception of Smith's later posting to America, for the rest of his military career--and he retired a lieutenant-general. He was a captain when they met.

As an officer's wife Juana Smith was spared the most exhausting details of survival, for she had a maid-servant, a horse, a groom,

a flock of goats for milk and meat, billets in quarters assigned to the brigadier (Smith was brigade-major, a staff officer), and, except in dire emergencies like the Burgos retreat, she could expect her basic needs to be met.

A fourteen year old Spanish girl, who would in normal times have faced the prospect of a sedentary, confined existence, must, if she were of the right temperament, have regarded following the army as a splendid adventure. Harry Smith rescued Juana from the sack of Badajoz, made her his lawful wife, and gave her the dignities of an officer's lady. He was capable of the most flattering romantic avowals, he surrounded her with the deference of his servants and his fellow officers, at one point he even allowed her to bring a priest in her entourage, and, on top of all that, he provided her with a situation of daring, risk, and excitement of the sort most calculated to appeal to the adolescent imagination. It is small wonder that she was devoted to him. One wonders whether she would have felt the same degree of devotion if he had given her a child to drag along in the baggage train of the Light Division.

The spirit of adventure, in Juana Smith's case undimmed by the anxieties of daily subsistence and childcare which burdened most soldiers' wives, may nevertheless have moved some soldiers' as well as officers' wives to follow their husbands' regiments abroad. Adventure is clearly an element of the experience.

Not all officers' wives were as well-regarded by observers as Mrs. Dalbiac and Juana Smith. General Long hints darkly that wives in Lisbon were keeping officers from their duties. Hay suggests

that an officer actually deserted his men in the Burgos retreat to go off with his wife, and Lt. Woodberry reflects that an unsatisfactory fellow officer's defects were attributable to the malevolent influence of his wife.<sup>75</sup>

Lt. Woodberry's diary also includes several negative reflections on the wife of a lieutenant of his unit whom he disliked because she was surly and had not responded to his offer to carry her child for her on horseback. (She was afoot.) Woodberry also disliked her husband, an ill-tempered man who beat his wife, a fact Woodberry records with uncharacteristic satisfaction. Although the husband was disgusting, it was the wife who was a disgrace to the regiment.<sup>76</sup>

All women with the army were dependent for their status on the repute and rank of their husbands--but an officer's mistress was in a position of heightened risk, and heightened opportunity for gain. Sgt. Donaldson records the downfall of one such woman, the mistress of a captain. She had behaved toward the man with the devotion of a wife. When she heard that he had been wounded at the battle of Vitoria she rode onto the field to find him, at some risk to her life, but she was too late.

She found him when he had breathed his last, and stopped by him until he was buried. This was an appalling blow for her: she was left friendless in a strange country: but those who paid her any little attention in the captain's lifetime, now felt no compassion for her. Her gold watch, her favorite pony, and all that she had formerly held through her protector, were taken from her, and a short time after, I saw her struggling through the mud in the line of march, with the shoes torn off her feet. She soon after disappeared, but what became of her I do not know.

The opposite process could be observed in the case of Anne Luke reported by Schaumann, who began as a dragoon's wife, was sold by him to a commissary, lived as mistress to several others and retired in respectable circumstances as the wife of a relatively wealthy man.<sup>78</sup> The mistress, then, ran greater economic and social risks than the wife, but was freer to use her situation as a means of social advancement. The wife's status, whether officer's or soldier's wife, was more securely tied to her husband's achievements. Juana Smith became Lady Smith (Ladysmith, South Africa, is named for her) but not until many years later.

Was there any possibility of a soldier's or officer's wife achieving independent identity short of widowhood? The idea of the femme soldat, of the woman as hero, glimmers like a mirage in the memoirs.

In a war which produced the Maid of Saragossa, a heroine of the siege of that city who was accorded the rank of colonel in the Spanish army for her efforts, one would expect a few British women to attain similar, independent status. The femme soldat is a legend of which the French, no doubt because of St. Joan, are fonder than the English. Some French and Spanish women were captured or killed in man's attire, or so the observers report. In the Seven Years' War the English had produced Hannah Snell, who enlisted to be near her lover, fought with the army for more than twenty years, and was pensioned for wounds taken in battle. Wheeler recounts such an instance and the rumor of another femme soldat is retailed by Wellington himself, yet the one clear case of a female hero recorded,

that of Mrs. Reston at the siege of Cádiz, went officially unnoticed. Sgt. Donaldson, indignant, wrote a full account of her actions in an attempt to gain a pension for her in her old age.<sup>79</sup>

Less heroically inclined women were killed or wounded in the course of the war. Wheeler and Cooper record soldiers' wives killed in action, and Surgeon Henry an amusing case of the wife of a soldier knocked flat by compression from a passing cannonball. She was sure she was dying, but Henry picked her up, dusted her off, examined her for wounds and assured her she was all right. The grateful woman dug in her pack and gave him several yards of blackpudding, a fee which, he says in what is clearly an oft-repeated joke, he did not pocket. Some women did receive pensions for injuries taken while following the army. A Peninsular soldier's wife known to Costello had her face destroyed in the explosion of an ammunition waggon at Quatre Bras in the Waterloo campaign. Apparently the loss of her beauty was pensionable, but Mrs. Reston's heroism under fire was not.<sup>80</sup>

Thus a British woman could expect no acknowledgement from the army for independent heroism, even when the opportunity for heroic action presented itself and she responded.

Most women contented themselves with their dependent identity as wives, but defining themselves by their relationship with their husbands had a positive side, nowhere more evident than in the instances of consideration and service wives provided their husbands as a matter of course.

Sometimes their wifeliness took precedence over direct orders, as in the early stages of the Coruña campaign when a cadre of wives on

donkeys, forbidden to continue in the line of march, discovered an alternate route and were found waiting for their husbands at the day's end, hot tea at the ready. The provost disapproved but the husbands didn't--it was December and miserably cold. This serviceability took more acceptable forms, also. Both officers' and soldiers' wives exerted themselves to find and nurse wounded husbands, as might be expected.<sup>81</sup>

The memoirs supply glimpses of small domestic acts carried on in incongruous settings: a wife bringing bread out to the picket line, supplying a picnic dinner by a cozy fire in the January snow, or just marching beside her husband, talking with him. ". . . they (the women) were always at hand, foraging, cooking, and rendering all kinds of assistance; while the men, borne down by hard fatigue, were often unable to help themselves."<sup>82</sup>

Harris cites the case of an Irishwoman whose husband was flogged as an example to looters in the Coruña retreat. The women stood by while her husband was whipped, covered him with his great-coat, and carried his sixty-pound pack and ammunition pouch for him as that difficult march continued. This extraordinary effort was exceeded by Bell's laundress, Mother Skiddy, who carried her exhausted husband (and his pack which he refused to abandon) half a league in the Burgos retreat. Fortunately he was a small man.<sup>83</sup> Wifeliness, then, was seen as service, as well as fidelity, to one's husband.

The comparable husbandly role of protector had always to give way to military duty, however, so that the consideration wives

displayed for husbands was not invariably reciprocated. Soldiers were not allowed to abandon duty to assist their wives, even in situations of immediate peril to the women. The well-intentioned husband's dilemma is underlined in an episode of the Burgos retreat. A soldier's wife who had followed the entire 1812 campaign became too exhausted in the retreat to continue. The man was allowed to fall out to try to find his wife a place on one of the supply waggons, but all the waggons proved to be overloaded already.

The poor fellow was now in a dreadful dilemma, being necessitated either to leave her to the mercy of the French soldiers, or by remaining with her to be taken prisoner, and even then perhaps to be unable to protect her. The alternative either way was heart-rending. . . . in despairing accents she begged him not to leave her, and at one time he had taken the resolution to remain; but the fear of being considered a deserter urged him to proceed, and with feelings easier imagined than described, he left her to her fate, and never saw her again. . . . the recollection of (his conduct) embittered his life.<sup>84</sup>

His fear of committing the major military sin, desertion, overcame his shame at abandoning her.

The blame for this lack of reciprocity lies with the army, not the husband, for requiring a superior loyalty. The man was married, not to his wife, but to the army. Harry Smith's insistence on his wife's subordination to his duty also illustrates this male hierarchy of loyalty. Many husbands did their best, within the confines of their duty, to help their wives. In the 1813 campaign, Sgt. Anton expended considerable effort to provide shelters for his wife more substantial than the newly issued tents, and Sgt. Stevenson allowed women of a Scots regiment who had become separated from their baggage train to shelter with his company for the night.

One of the women had given birth the day before and her husband took the trouble to look Stevenson up afterwards to thank him for his kindness. The man had been unable to help his own wife, however, and it is clear in this incident and others that the women expected reliable and sustained help from other women of the regiment rather than from their husbands, or even from passing sergeants.<sup>85</sup>

An article entitled "Some Observations on Woman's Self-Concept in the Early 18th Century" which had looked promising proved very disappointing because it dealt only with the literati. Nevertheless it provided a quotation which seems to sum up the positive side of these women's other-directed identity:

To assert their uniqueness of personality and its rights, then, these women. . . turned. . . (to) the emotions, and for them apparently love was the greatest of human emotions. It was well worth all the risk it required. It enriched their worlds and sharpened their perceptions of self. <sup>86</sup> Thereby they were fully women and fully themselves.

If they were expected to exist for others, the wives who followed the army found means of asserting their individual identities through the serviceability expected of them. This was sometime a paradox.

The major attributes of wifeliness, then, were sexual fidelity and serviceability. To define oneself primarily as a wife was to risk abandonment or to risk loss of identity through the husband's death, but those risks might seem less frightening than the immediate economic plight of the women left behind when the regiments sailed for Portugal.



### CHAPTER III

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>14</sup>For the discussion of economic and social background, and for material on working-class wives, the following sources were very useful: Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850, (New York: Kellen, 1967), Neil McKendrick, "Home Demand and Economic Growth: A New View of the Role of Women and Children in the Industrial Revolution," in Neil McKendrick, ed., Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in Honour of J. H. Plumb (London: Europa Pub., 1974), 152-210, Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, Household and Family in Past Time (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer (New York: Anchor Books, 1968) and The Village Labourer, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1948), G. E. and K. R. Fussell, The English Countrywoman, a Farmhouse Social History A.D. 1500-1900 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971), J. Jean Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," Journal of the History of Ideas, XX (1959), 195-216, Elizabeth Gilboy, Wages in Eighteenth Century England (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), F. Barry Smith, "Sexuality in Britain, 1800-1900" in Martha Vicinus, ed., A Widening Sphere (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 182-198, and E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

<sup>15</sup>Gleig, Subaltern, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, p. 243, John Stevenson, A Soldier in Time of War (London: W. Brittain, 1841), p. 174. Confirmation of the tradition of taking some wives and of the preference for childless, useful women is found in a General Order of Howe during the American Revolution, in John Barker, "Diary of Lt. John Barker," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, VII (1928), 150.

<sup>17</sup>Fitchett (Anton), op. cit., pp. 243-4, Gleig, op. cit., p. 18, Stevenson, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>18</sup>Gleig, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>19</sup>Lawrence, Autobiography, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup>John Patterson, The Adventures of Capt. John Patterson, 2 vols. (London: T. & W. Boone, 1837), I, 11.

<sup>21</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 7, pp. 202-3, Thomas Morris, The Napoleonic Wars, John Selby, ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1967), p. 26.

<sup>22</sup>Fortescue, A History of the British Army, vol. 4, p. 77, vol. 5, p. 302. Material on army recruiting is largely drawn from Fortescue.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., vol. 3, p. 519.

<sup>24</sup>Oman, Wellington's Army, p. 276, Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 11, p. 141.

<sup>25</sup>Fortescue, A History of the British Army, vol. 3, p. 529.

<sup>26</sup>McKendrick, "Home Demand and Economic Growth," p. 157.

<sup>27</sup>Stevenson, Soldier in Time of War, p. 100, 111-12, Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, 4 vols. (New York: Dover Pub., 1968, rpt. of 1861 ed.), III, 425-7. Mayhew interviewed the wife of a soldier posted abroad in 1861. She was quite destitute. The lack of family allowances continued well into the imperial period.

<sup>28</sup>Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, pp. 243-4.

<sup>29</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 7, p. 202.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., vol. 11, p. 141.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., vol. 7, pp. 202-3.

<sup>32</sup>Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 7, pp. 34-5.

<sup>33</sup>Edward Costello, Military Memoirs: Edward Costello, Antony Brett-James, ed. (New York: Archon Books, 1968) pp. 1-2.

<sup>34</sup>Fortescue, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 903-5, Susan Sibbald, The Memoirs of Susan Sibbald (1783-1812), Frances Paget Hett, ed. (New York: Minton, Balch, 1926), p. 277.

<sup>35</sup>Benjamin Miller, "The Adventures of Sgt. Benjamin Miller," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, VI (1928), 51.

<sup>36</sup>Gillian Avery, ed., The Echoing Green (New York: Viking Press 1974), p. 40.

<sup>37</sup>Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 5, p. 302, 210-11.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., vol. 3, p. 529, vol. 5, p. 230, Morris, Napoleonic Wars, pp. 110-13.

<sup>39</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, p. 296.

<sup>40</sup>Sibbald, Memoirs, p. 272, Andrew Barnard, et al., The Barnard Letters, Anthony Powell, ed. (London: Duckworth, 1928), p. 240.

<sup>41</sup>David Levine, Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism (New York: Academic Press, 1977), p. 11, R. B. Outhwaite, "Age at Marriage in England from the Late Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, III (1973), 67.

<sup>42</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 7, pp. 202-3.

<sup>43</sup>Autobiography of a Private Soldier Showing the Dangers of Rashly Enlisting (Sunderland: Williams and Binns, 1838, pam.), p. 18. Hereafter abbreviated Pvt. Soldier.

<sup>44</sup>Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 15-16, Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 7, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup>Fortescue, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 898-900, Longford, Wellington, pp. 260-1.

<sup>46</sup>Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, pp. 241-3.

<sup>47</sup>Harry Smith, The Autobiography of Lt. Gen. Sir Harry Smith, vol. 1, G. C. Moore-Smith, ed. (London: John Murray, 1901), p. 96.

<sup>48</sup>(Thomas Bunbury), Reminiscences of a Veteran, vol. 1 (London: Chas. J. Skeet, 1861), p. 298.

<sup>49</sup>Costello, Military Memoirs, p. 149, Joseph Donaldson, The Eventful Life of a Soldier (London: Richard Griffin, 1836), p. 209, Grattan, Adventures of the Connaught Rangers, vol. 2, pp. 202-3, George Simmons, A British Rifleman, Willoughby Verner, ed. (London: A. & C. Black 1899), p. 350.

<sup>50</sup>August L. F. Schaumann, On the Road with Wellington, trans. and ed., Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: Knopf, 1925), p. 205, Journal of an Officer of the King's German Legion (London: Colburn, 1827), p. 177. Hereafter abbreviated KGL Officer.

<sup>51</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 5, p. 143.

<sup>52</sup>John Spencer Cooper, Rough Notes of Seven Campaigns, 2nd ed. (Carlisle: G. & T. Coward, 1914), p. 86, Wellington, Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington, K. G., vols. 6-7, 2nd Duke of Wellington, ed. (London: John Murray, 1860), VII, 42, Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 7, p. 265.

- <sup>53</sup>Wellington, Supplementary Despatches, vol. 6, p. 383.
- <sup>54</sup>Bell, Rough Notes, pp. 74-6, George Bell, Soldier's Glory, (London: G. Bell, 1956), p. 60, Grattan, Adventures, vol. 1, p. 161.
- <sup>55</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 5, p. 54.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 6, p. 335.
- <sup>57</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, p. 205.
- <sup>58</sup>Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 197-8.
- <sup>59</sup>Surtees, 25 Years with the Rifle Brigade, pp. 157-8, Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 102-3, Larpent, Private Journal, vol. 1, p. 100.
- <sup>60</sup>Oxford English Dictionary, entry for "solatium."
- <sup>61</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 221-3.
- <sup>62</sup>Thomas, "The Double Standard," pp. 213, 216, Janelle Greenberg, "The Legal Status of English Women in the Early 18th Century Common Law and Equity," Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture, IV (1975), 175.
- <sup>63</sup>John Henry Cooke, Memoirs of the Late War (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), p. 78, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 105, Fitchett (Harris), Wellington's Men, p. 218, Larpent, Private Journal, vol. 1, pp. 142-3, Robert Ballard Long, A Peninsular Cavalry General (1811-1813), T. H. McGuffie, ed. (London: Harrap, 1951), p. 231, Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 93, 259. Wellington's attitude is chronicled in Wellington, A Great Man's Friendship, Lady Burghclere, ed. (London: John Murray, 1927), pp. 136-7, and in every volume of the Dispatches consulted. A summary of his diagnosis of conditions producing property crimes may be found in Dispatches, vol. 9, p. 225.
- <sup>64</sup>Sibbald, Memoirs, pp. 290-2, 296.
- <sup>65</sup>H. Smith, Autobiography, p. 73, 172, Grattan, Adventures, vol. 1, pp. 161-2, Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 222-3, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 61, Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 67-8.
- <sup>66</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 6, pp. 381-2, vol. 8, pp. 187-8, vol. 11, p. 439. See also Journal of a Regimental Officer in Portugal and Spain (London: J. Johnson, 1810), p. 114, hereafter abbreviated Regimental Officer, George Landmann, Recollections of my Military Life, 2 vols (London: 1854), I, 145-6, 157. Lejeune is quoted in William Wheeler, The Letters of Private Wheeler, B. H. Liddell-Hart, ed. (London: 1951), p. 101.

<sup>67</sup>Long, Cavalry General (to his sister), p. 93.

<sup>68</sup>Bell, Rough Notes, pp. 46-7, Sibbald, op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>69</sup>H. Smith, Autobiography, pp. 71-2.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 99-100, 144.

<sup>71</sup>John, Lord Seaton, Life of John Colborne, Field Marshal Lord Seaton, G. C. Moore-Smith, ed. (London: John Murray, 1903), pp. 349-50, H. Smith, op. cit., pp. 70, 90, 11, Larpent, Private Journal, vol. 1, pp. 54-5, 73-4.

<sup>72</sup>H. Smith, op. cit., pp. 168, 76-7, 93-6, 85-6.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 187, Sibbald, Memoirs, p. 280.

<sup>74</sup>H. Smith, op. cit., pp. 186-7.

<sup>75</sup>Long, Cavalry General, p. 164, Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 8, p. 50, Barnard, Letters, p. 185, William Hay, Reminiscences under Wellington (London: Simpkins, Marshall, Hamilton & Kent, 1901), p. 75, George Woodberry, Journal du Lt. Woodberry, trans. Georges Hélié, into French (Paris: Librairie Plon, Nourrit, 1896), p. 90.

<sup>76</sup>Woodberry, op. cit., pp. 160-1.

<sup>77</sup>Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 321-2.

<sup>78</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 221-2.

<sup>79</sup>Journal of an Officer of the Commissariat Dept. of the Army (London: Porter & King, 1820), p. 61, hereafter abbreviated Commissary, Joseph Thackwell, Military Memoirs of Lt. Gen. Sir Joseph Thackwell, H. C. Wyllly, ed. (London: John Murray, 1908), p. 93, James Woodforde, Diary of a Country Parson, John Beresford, ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 143, Wheeler, Letters, pp. 233-4, Wellington, A Great Man, pp. 89-90, Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 319-20, Pinchbeck, Women Workers, p. 298.

<sup>80</sup>Wheeler, Letters, p. 100, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 125, Walter Henry, Surgeon Henry's Trifles, Pat Hayward, ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), p. 94, Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 15-16.

<sup>81</sup>Samuel Thorpe, Narrative of Incidents in the Early Military Life of Maj. Samuel Thorpe (London: Seeley's, 1854), pp. 30-1, Costello, op. cit., pp. 153-4, Memoirs of a Sergeant of the 5th Regiment of Foot (Ashford: Elliott, 1842), p. 49, Regimental Officer, p. 114, Landmann, Recollections, pp. 154-7.

<sup>82</sup>Patterson, Adventures, p. 80.

<sup>83</sup>Cooper, Rough Notes, pp. 55-6, Cooke, Memoirs, p. 74, Fitchett (Harris), Wellington's Men, p. 218, Bell, Rough Notes, pp. 182-3.

<sup>84</sup>Donaldson, Eventful Life, p. 164.

<sup>85</sup>Fitchett (Anton), op. cit., pp. 244-5, Stevenson, Soldier in Time of War, pp. 129-30.

<sup>86</sup>Miriam Benkovitz, "Some Observations on Woman's Self-Concept in the 18th Century," in Paul Fritz and Richard Morton, eds., Woman in the Eighteenth Century and Other Essays (Toronto: McMaster Association for 18th C. Studies, 1976), p. 54.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOTHERS AND WIDOWS

Motherhood and widowhood were sex-roles of women with the army that struck observers as more dramatic than the role of wife. Although the two roles are not necessarily connected, there was a high probability that a woman who was a mother would also at some point, perhaps at several points in the course of the war, become a widow. For mothers, widowhood was even more threatening, socially and economically, than it was for wives in general, but it is the dramatic, almost archetypal light in which observers saw both widows and mothers that makes discussion of the two roles in the same chapter inevitable. Expectations about motherhood stressed the peril of a role that was already perilous in the parent culture. Expectations about the proper conduct of widows placed additional strain on the widowed woman, particularly in her consideration of the possibility of remarriage.<sup>87</sup>

The value placed on motherhood may be seen in the courtesy title of "Mother" given to respected women with the army. In some ways a stronger and more independent means of self-definition than the wife role, motherhood in the line of march was particularly vulnerable to the dangers of war. Neither the army nor society provided support services for children, so the full burden of nurture and childrearing rested squarely on the shoulders of the mothers.<sup>88</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, maternity was an undertaking a full of peril as any battle. That was true in general and not just for the women following the army, but the routine hardships and sudden alarms of a military campaign made childbearing even more dangerous than it was in the parent culture. A regiment could not be halted while a woman stopped to give birth nor did the column accommodate its pace to the gait of a pregnant woman.<sup>89</sup>

The memoirists, many writing their accounts in the early Victorian period, were fascinated and appalled by the plight of pregnant women with the army. Modern opinion suggests that a great deal of walking probably makes for a healthier pregnancy, provided the mother gets the right nutrition. Deficient food and ignorance of sanitation probably contributed more to miscarriages and deaths in childbirth than following the line of march.

The memoirists never mention pregnancy unless the women were visibly gravid or in labor. That maybe a semi-taboo or, more likely, indifference. It goes without saying that menstruation is never mentioned, and would not have been by a female writer--a true taboo--so that no information at all can be adduced as to the relationship between episodes of short rations and infertility. Nevertheless, women did bear children while on campaign, and the children who survived also became camp followers.<sup>90</sup>

The prohibition against a woman with children being allowed to sail with the regiment, though it may have been an army preference, was not the universal practice. There are too many references in the sources to children of intermediate age accompanying their mothers.



Notable are the examples drawn from the 1808-9 campaigns. Perhaps the rule was enforced later. Certainly later references are more often to infants and toddlers. Thus, though a mother with the army was apt to be the mother of young children, exceptions existed in sufficient numbers to be noticed.<sup>91</sup>

At this point in the nineteenth century the maternal role primarily involved nurture of infants and toddlers. After the child passed the stage of obvious helplessness, the distinction between childhood and adulthood grew unclear, and children were probably regarded as probationary adults. Parents gave children advice, work-experience, practical examples of survival behavior, but a great deal of the child's formation must have come from simple observation and imitation.<sup>92</sup>

That childhood as a separate stage of existence was not yet firmly established is illustrated in the ages at which boys took up their duties as officers. Jane Austen's two naval brothers served as midshipmen aboard warships in their early teens and Edward Pakenham, Wellington's Provost Marshal, took up his army commission at fifteen. Costello gives an instance of a young boy, a drummer, who was wounded in the same action that killed the boy's father. The probability of boys taking up adult roles with the army very young was even greater in the ranks than in the officer corps. Drummers enlisted for life.<sup>93</sup>

Women could find gainful employment with the army, but children were economically dysfunctional. With the exception of drummer boys and Portuguese goatherds (no accounts of English boys

herding goats occur), there were few jobs assigned to children. No doubt the older children helped their mothers in everyday subsistence tasks but, in contemporary parlance, children had no utility with the army, which was not the case in the parent culture. There was probably child-abuse deriving from this "use-lessness" but only one instance of deliberate abandonment is mentioned.<sup>94</sup>

On the contrary, the memoirists chronicle cases of desperate maternal devotion and anxiety. The plight of mothers and children touched the memoirists. Observers noticed instances of devotion, because of their own expectations of maternal behavior and their ideas of the pathetic, thus there may be some exaggeration in the accounts.<sup>95</sup> Even so, the overall picture is moving and frightening.

The starving condition of the army in the retreat from Talavera has been described in the chapter on Wives.<sup>96</sup> Relatively few instances of mothers and children being separated in the line of march occur, however, probably because the retreat was slow and there was no close pursuit. The chief effects upon women and children--hunger and dysentery--go unrecorded, but mortality among the men was very high, and one assumes it would also have been high among women and children.<sup>97</sup>

In the retreat from Burgos to Portugal (1812), and especially in the retreat upon Coruña in the winter of 1808-9, numerous instances occur of mothers and children separated, lost, dying, and, in some cases, captured by the pursuing French army. In both of these retreats the discipline of the army gave way, which meant confusion,

destruction of needed supplies, drunkenness, blocked roads, straggling from the line of march, and a general attitude of selfishness. The strong did not always stop to help the weak.<sup>98</sup>

The Coruña retreat produced the most detailed accounts. A number of sources record exhausted women and children lying down in the snow to die. In one gruesome instance a woman fell down in the mud and was trampled underfoot by the retreating column of soldiers. A number of pregnant women gave birth, one to twins, in the line of march. Surprisingly at least one mother and child survived.<sup>99</sup>

Children lost track of their mothers and were brought to Coruña by artillerymen or officers, and in one case a girl of fourteen was later restored to her parents in England through the medium of a newspaper advertisement. Her mother had been captured, raped, and released by the French. Her young brother, also captured, remained a French prisoner for years. Rifleman Harris was haunted by the recollection of an exhausted mother dragging a screaming eight-year-old boy along the line of march. Finally the child was so exhausted he could scream no longer and the last Harris saw of them they had both fallen by the wayside, unable to continue.<sup>100</sup>

One image of mothers in the retreat, however, occurs four times in separate accounts.

Charles Steevens describes the general loss of life along the line of march, adding, "once or twice I saw a little infant lying close to its mother, both dead. . . ."<sup>101</sup> Adam Neale, a surgeon, considered that the deaths of women increased the general horror. ". . . some died of fatigue and cold, while their infants were seen

vainly sucking at their clay-cold breasts. . . ."102 In the same collection of memoirs, a soldier notes:

In the centre (of the scene) lay a woman, young and lovely, though cold in death, and a child, apparently about six or seven months old, attempting to draw support from the breast of the dead mother.<sup>103</sup>

Finally August Schaumann's memoirs include the following incident:

A soldier's wife had sought shelter beneath his (a dead drover's) cart, but she, too, was lying lifeless; and the tragic part of it was that child, who was still alive, was whimpering and trying to find nourishment at her frozen breasts! One or two officers had the child taken from her, and wrapping it in a blanket, carried it away.<sup>104</sup>

A memoir of the Burgos retreat includes a similar account from the later ordeal.<sup>105</sup> No figures are available for the number of women and children lost in the three major retreats of the British army. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that this tragedy, or something similar to it, happened to some women and some children. It is an arch-typical rather than a typical experience, but it illustrates the real danger to women and their children who followed the army on campaign.

The retreats are extreme examples of motherhood under stress. Parenting, for the most part, must have been conducted in a mundane pattern of nurture, work, advice, and simple interaction. The dependent child was, however, wholly the responsibility of the parents.

Certainly the army, apart from the fractional ration, made no attempt to deal with children's special needs on the march. That was the mother's responsibility. The situation was beginning to change in garrison stations, however. Wellington refers to a school

at the Belém hospital (near Lisbon), which was the major medical establishment of the army for much of the war. Pvt. Wheeler, when he became Sgt. Wheeler in the 1830's, served as regimental schoolmaster on Malta, and there is an earlier reference to a sergeant as regimental schoolmaster.<sup>106</sup>

About all that can be said of these schools is that they existed, but that, in itself, is proof that the vexed question of educating the poor had infiltrated army thinking at a relatively early date. Although the army itself was a conservative, traditional institution, individual colonels might hold Radical, or at least novel, opinions, and colonels had the power to decide whether the children of their regiments should or should not be educated through the agency of the regiment. That a school was attached to the Belém hospital, however, transcends mere regimental jurisdiction, for the hospital received patients (and their families) from many regiments. The fact is more useful in establishing a precedent than a general practice, however, for the school cannot have served more than a fraction of the children with the army.

The army did not remove the main burden of training children, either in terms of literacy or in terms of work-skills, from their mothers, nor did it see to moral instruction. Formal religious instruction, whether of children or adults with the army, was ill-served by the Established Church. Although there were chaplains on the regular army establishment, the position seems to have been regarded as a sinecure. Few chaplains followed their regiments to the Peninsula and even fewer into action, though Wellington describes an exception.

I have one excellent young man in this army, Mr. Briscall, who is attached to head quarters, who has never been one moment absent from his duty; but I have not yet seen another who has not applied, and made a pitiable case for leave of absence immediately after his arrival; and, excepting Mr. Denis at Lisbon, who was absent all last year, I<sup>107</sup> believe Mr. Briscall is the only Chaplain doing duty.

The general lack of chaplains was also recorded, with some bitterness, by Sgt. Lawrence. Thus the children of the regiment would not have received the religious instruction usual before confirmation, and it is problematical whether they received baptism. Such familiarity as they had with the Prayerbook must have come from mothers or other adults with the army, not from chaplains.<sup>108</sup>

The deficiency of formal religious counsel was in part compensated for by Methodist lay-preachers among the soldiers. Wellington noted the preachers' presence with mistrust. Methodist egalitarianism (even if it extended only to religious matters) offended his lordship's sense of hierarchy. Nevertheless these lay-preachers were allowed to continue their mission. They must have made a mark, for many rank-and-file memoirs were written by men who had "seen the light." Their piety has a distinct evangelical cast. Traditional Methodist concern for the poor and the powerless makes it likely that, if the children received religious counsel at all, they received Methodist counsel.<sup>109</sup>

If the women and their children were Roman Catholics, and many of the Irish were, they may have been able to receive counsel and the sacraments in the regiment. There appear to have been Irish priests with, or at any rate moving among, the Irish regiments. It could not be determined whether these priests were brought with

the regiments (unlikely), paid their own passage (possible) or originated in the Irish colleges of the Coimbra and Salamanca universities.<sup>110</sup> In general, Catholic and Methodist families among the regiments probably did receive religious counsel, but formal religious instruction of children did not exist. Mothers, again, bore the burden of moral instruction.

The major anxiety of a mother for her children probably had little to do with formal learning, whether secular or religious. Apart from the sheer danger to the child's safety posed by the war, she must have felt great anxiety for her children's fate in the event of her own death. Orphanages for soldiers' children existed in England, and the parish workhouse also provided an inadequate solution to the problem, but the army had no mechanism for gathering and transporting British orphans from the Peninsula to England.

Orphans were sometimes adopted, either by individual soldiers or by the regiment. This adoption was informal, of course, and probably restricted to boys, though instances occur of young girls, temporarily separated from their mothers, being cared for by the women of other regiments. One soldier whose wife had died carried his infant in his pack and cared for it for several months in the line of march. A boy bereft of both parents was adopted by a soldier of Steevens' regiment and raised in barracks when the troops went home.<sup>111</sup>

All the same, no formal procedure for keeping track of and caring for orphans is recorded. Thus a woman's anxiety for herself in a situation of peril was magnified by her concern that her children would become mere flotsam of battle if she died.

To summarize, mothers and children appear in the memoirs largely in archetypal dramas of physical peril. Apart from the school at Belém for convalescent soldiers' children and the Methodist and Roman Catholic religious presence, neither society nor the army provided institutional services to help mothers with their children's upbringing. The role of women as mothers, then, was burdensome and ridden with anxiety for the children's physical well-being.

A striking instance of the kind of mishap that could occur is chronicled in Sgt. Donaldson's memoirs. After the battle of Orthez (France, 1814) a small child was found on the battlefield in the care of a wounded French officer who had covered the child with his cloak and amused it until it fell asleep. The battle over, neither the French officer nor the child wished to part with one another, but a search was nevertheless set in motion to find the mother. Several days later mother and child were reunited.

She stated, that having come into the town in rear of where the army were engaged, the child had wandered from her knee while she was suckling a younger one, and that she had searched every part of the town for him without being able to get the least trace of the direction he had taken, or what had become of him.<sup>112</sup>

Despite these mothers' heightened anxiety, however, there is no evidence that motherhood as an institution differed materially from the pattern of mothering at the same economic and social level in England. Having children increased the women's hardships, but "excess of suffering, which tore asunder every other tie, only rendered maternal love stronger, and it was amazing what hardships were voluntarily endured for the sake of their offspring."<sup>113</sup>



If motherhood was an anxiety-ridden experience for soldiers' wives, soldiers' widows, especially widows with dependent children, were in even worse case. Fidelity was a major component of wifeliness, and there was some expectation that it would extend beyond the grave. That expectation put increased stress on the widow who had defined herself in terms of her wifely role. Fidelity demanded that she mourn her husband, but serviceability demanded that she find another man. Her own and her children's needs often tipped the balance in favor of rapid remarriage.

Widows, including widows with children, figure frequently in the memoirs. As with the nursing mothers who perished in the retreats, widows are often the subject of dramatic set-pieces, but a certain skepticism tempers the pathos, for women widowed in the course of the war frequently remarried at once. Sometimes they were widowed and speedily remarried several times.

In this period--and for centuries before--a long-lived Englishman might expect to marry and bury several wives, though an interval of mourning was customary. Wellington, in 1811, received a letter informing him of the death of General le Marchant's wife, "who, though quite well when he left her, died a day or two ago. As he has ten children, it is possible this event may bring him home again."<sup>114</sup>

Widowers were numerous in the parent culture. The widow, because rarer, was a more dramatic figure. For widowed ladies in respectable circumstances, custom decreed a half-year in black, followed by another six months of half-mourning in which they wore muted colors--grey, lavender, beige--while their sensibilities

revived and their minds began to turn once more to the business of living. Elaborate funeral monuments of the period encumber most English churches.

Among the poorer classes burial clubs, an early form of personal insurance, guaranteed a dignified funeral. A pauper's unceremonious burial was regarded with horror. The flamboyant drama of the public execution of criminals was memorialized in countless street ballads and probably seemed more appealing than the pauper's anonymity.<sup>115</sup>

Although necrophilia had not yet reached the cult status it achieved under Victoria, pomp in funerals was a value of early nineteenth century English culture and mourning a decency. At no other point were military experience and practice more at odds with the parent culture than in the matter of death.

War is licensed murder. From that fact its other anomalous features proceed. It is the business of soldiers to kill and be killed. Death is normal, even casual. Furthermore, this war reversed the mortality pattern of the larger society. At home a wife, because of mortality in childbirth, could expect to predecease her husband. In the Peninsula the opposite was true.

When a woman's husband died of dysentery, malarial ague, food poisoning, blood poisoning, snakebite, typhus, gangrene, hypothermia, heatstroke, exhaustion, or any of the other afflictions the army was subject to, or when he was killed outright or died of wounds, the odds were good that she would remarry within the week. Godfrey Davies cites an example of a woman married six times in the course of

the war, the highest number recorded. Two or three marriages were common.<sup>116</sup> Mourning is a natural device of the human mind for coping with death. Only the details of mourning are determined by culture. Ought these widows to have conformed to the formalities of mourning prescribed by their own society? Some did.

Very early in the war, Rifleman Harris' company was caught in heavy fire and a friend of his named Cochran was shot through the head while taking a drink of water from his canteen. After the fight, Cochran's wife came looking for her husband among the wounded. Harris was so reluctant to tell her what had happened that he had to be ordered to do so. She asked to be shown her husband's body and Harris took her to the spot where the man had fallen.

. . . she embraced a stiffened corpse, and after rising and contemplating his disfigured face for some minutes, with hands clasped and tears streaming down her cheeks, she took a prayer-book from her pocket, and, kneeling down, repeated the service for the dead over the body. When she had finished she appeared a good deal comforted, and I took the opportunity of beckoning to a pioneer I saw near . . . and together we dug a hole and quickly buried the body.<sup>117</sup>

The rare widow who, like Mrs. Cochran, undertook to follow the culturally approved pattern was esteemed. Gleig cites with approval an Irish widow who also mourned and refused to remarry, but he remembers her as an exception.<sup>118</sup>

A show of mourning, at least, was expected. Several set-pieces in the memoirs display widows in the act of public mourning, shrieking, beating their breasts, kissing dead men's faces, although few accounts are as flamboyant as Sgt. Donaldson's cameo of a widow and her children seeking out the husband's body after the siege of Badajoz.

. . . looking on his pallid features, she gave a wild scream, and the lifeless body fell from her arms. Sinking on her knees, she cast her eyes to heaven, while she strained the infant to her bosom with a convulsive gasp; the blood had fled her face, nor did a muscle of it move: she seemed inanimate, and all her faculties were absorbed in grief.<sup>119</sup>

This woman's grief may or may not have been genuine. The sergeant's style of reporting, however, molds the form her grief took into the approved pattern.

Sometimes the show of grief masked hypocrisy or shallowness of mind. Ross-Lewin records a case of the widow of an ensign whose display of mourning after her husband's death was so dramatically rending that uninvolved bystanders, nay Spanish muleteers, wept. Ross-Lewin saw her next day in the company of a commissary with gold epaulettes, laughing and chatting as if she hadn't a care in the world. She might have been in shock, a possibility that Ross-Lewin does not mention, or she might well have been as shallow as he believed. He was embarrassed to have been taken in by her.<sup>120</sup> Widows, whatever their feelings, were expected to maintain a decent appearance of mourning.

A certain amount of black humor apparently crept into the process of dealing with deaths in battle. Bell presents Mother Skiddy, after Orthez, looking for her husband who had been wounded. The soldiers teased her, saying that Dan Skiddy was either dead or run off with a passing Frenchwoman. "An' he'll spake Irish to her," she is reputed to have responded. It is clear that the teasing relieved her mind. If Dan had been killed they would not have teased her. Several officers report, rather shamefaced in retrospect,

that auctions of dead officers' effects were occasions for a great deal of joking and horseplay. The use of humor as a mechanism for dealing with death, at least, transcends the time-gap.<sup>121</sup>

Mother Skiddy was willing to joke about her husband's powers as a linguist, but her purpose in discovering his fate was not comic. If he were wounded she meant to nurse him, because there was no assurance that he would otherwise receive medical care. If he were dead she meant to see him buried where scavenging animals (and people) could not get at him. One recurring horror of this war was the sight of vultures and wolves feeding on the unburied corpses after a battle. In the immediate aftermath of a fight, human scavengers (civilians, or soldiers and followers of the army, including women) could always be seen stripping dead bodies of valuables. It wasn't "dacent." Mother Skiddy did not mean to allow it to happen to her husband. In seeing to it that the man was properly buried, the wife was asserting his worth and dignity as a person, at a time when official casualty reports did not bother to list the names of soldiers killed in action.<sup>122</sup> In asserting her husband's worth, the wife was also asserting her own worth and her identity as his true widow.

The same men who expected the widow to mourn, however, frequently became importunate suitors. Harris, who was so reluctant to inform Cochran's wife that she was a widow, reports that, their encounter having created sympathy between them, he proposed marriage to her almost immediately afterwards. She refused him. A healthy, good-natured British widow would receive many such offers within

days of her husband's death. She could pick and choose. This fact--shocking to some commentators, disgusting to others--shows the value placed upon wives, by the soldiers if not by their commanders.

Commanders would undoubtedly have agreed with Sir Charles Oman when he placed his brief, sour comments on soldiers' wives in a chapter on "impedimenta." Indeed, the wives, if they had been given family allowances, might have preferred to remain at home in the first place, but the line-up to marry widows speaks eloquently of the ordinary soldiers' attitude.<sup>123</sup>

Grattan says, cynically, of the women with the army, that the worst that could befall them "was the chance of being in a state of widowhood for a week."<sup>124</sup> (He meant as the outcome of any given battle.) This view was repeated directly and indirectly a number of times in the sources and was apparently a widespread opinion. Sgt. Anton is one of the few contemporary observers to try, rather haltingly, to defend the practice of marriage.

I make free to offer this remark, in justification of many a good woman, who, in a few months, perhaps weeks, after her sudden bereavement, becomes the wife of a second husband; and, although slightly spoken of by some of little feeling, in and out of the army, yet this is, perhaps, the only alternative to save a lone, innocent woman's reputation; and the soldier who offers himself may be as little inclined to the connection through any selfish motive as the woman may be from any desire of his love, but the peculiar situation in which she is placed renders it necessary, without consulting false feelings, or regarding the idle remarks that may be made, to feel grateful for a protector,<sup>125</sup> and in a soldier, the most binding is the surest.

Put in other terms, these men and women made marriages of convenience, old-fashioned marriages. For the man there was, on the

one hand, the kindly impulse of protectiveness, on the other, a desire for the undoubted comfort, utility, and sexual convenience a wife represented. For the woman, simple self-preservation was probably foremost in her mind. Independence could require special qualities, including defiance of convention, which not all women possessed. Besides, marriage is also sexually convenient to women.

To find observers so hostile to convenient remarriages (and Anton so defensive) is somewhat surprising. The romantic model of love-and-marriage, not a new idea certainly at this time, seems to have had a firm grip on the memoirists' imaginations. Many memoirs were not written down until well into the Victorian era, and the shifts of attitude represented by twenty-five or thirty years have also to be taken into account. Davies, commenting much later, makes the most fuss over the problem. Still, so many of the memoirists noticed--and remembered--the pattern of remarriage that it must have struck them as strange at the time.

Economics, not surprisingly, is a clue to the rapidity with which Peninsular widows remarried. A widow was not entitled to the ration, though few captains were so hard-hearted they would have cut her and her children off immediately. She was not entitled to commissariat support, however. When she went to settle with the paymaster for her husband's arrears, the widow would also find a sum subtracted for his funeral expenses--in the circumstances, a clear case of legalized theft.<sup>126</sup> Eventually a widow determined to stay single would either have to leave the regiment to return home

and petition for a pension, or find some means of self-support in the army milieu.

Although they were surprised when she declined to remarry at once, most of her husband's comrades respected the widow's decision and even seem to have tried to make her path smoother. Indeed the immediate offers of marriage may be seen partly in that light. Anton's lengthy gropings, quoted above, were prompted by his recollection of the case of a widow who would not remarry. She was given a dignified and respectable means of getting home, a wounded captain who hired her to nurse him providing the male escort propriety demanded.<sup>127</sup>

Women for whom propriety was of less moment could attempt to earn a living in paid work associated with followers, but that could be risky. Before he returned to Ireland at the end of the war, George Bell settled with Mother Skiddy for a year's worth of laundering and indeed would have been unable to settle sooner, for officers' pay was usually even further in arrears than the men's. Officers were not reliable employers and, if the woman could not afford to set up as a sutler, dependence on cash wages was very chancy.<sup>128</sup>

Propriety and subsistence was not the only concerns of the unattached woman, however. One memoirist records an instance of soldiers' widows being robbed by Spanish plunderers. Rape was a present danger as well.<sup>129</sup> A woman of energy and some experience of hand-to-hand combat might risk an independent life as a widow. For most widows, however, remarriage to the most congenial among their



suitors probably represented a sensible, practical--and quick--solution to their difficulties, and that would be doubly true of women with children to protect and provide for.

It may be seen that the special conditions of war placed extreme stress on women as mothers. Motherhood does not seem to have altered significantly from the pattern of the parent culture, however. Both in England and in the Peninsula, it was a risky, anxiety-ridden experience. For widows, the conditions of war tended to force a return to the old-fashioned concept of the marriage of convenience, although such marriages were regarded by observers with the discomfort of romantics brought up against unpalatable facts.

## CHAPTER IV

### ENDNOTES

<sup>87</sup>Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, Robert Baldick, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), provides an illuminating discussion of the late emergence of childhood as a concept. Other general sources for both parenting and widowhood include David Levine, Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism (New York: Academic Press, 1977), Neil McKendrick, "Home Demand and Economic Growth: A New View of the Role of Women and Children in the Industrial Revolution," in Neil McKendrick, ed., Historical Perspectives (London: Europa Pub., 1974), pp. 152-210, Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, Household and Family in Past Time (London: Cambridge U. Press, 1974), and Bogna W. Lorence, "Parents and Children in 18th-Century Europe," History of Childhood Quarterly, II (1974), 1-30.

<sup>88</sup>H. Smith, Autobiography, p. 73, 172, Grattan, Adventures, vol. 1, pp. 161-2, Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 222-3, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 61, Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 67-8.

<sup>89</sup>Barbara Hargreaves, Diary of a Farmer's Wife (London: Countrywise Books, 1964), pp. 30-1, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 17, James Gunn, "Memoirs of Pvt. James Gunn," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, XLIX (1971) 99, John Kincaid, Adventures in the Rifle Brigade, 3rd ed. (London: T. & W. Boone, 1847), p. 263.

<sup>90</sup>John Harris, Recollections of Rifleman Harris, Christopher Hibbert, ed. (London: 1970), pp. 84-5, Gunn, loc. cit., Memoirs of a Serjeant, pp. 62-3.

<sup>91</sup>Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 114-15, Harris, op. cit., pp. 87-8, Steevens, Reminiscences, p. 71.

<sup>92</sup>Ariès, Centuries of Childhood, pp. 411-13.

<sup>93</sup>Longford, Wellington, p. 357, Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 4, p. 213, vol. 5, p. 199, Costello, Military Memoirs, p. 100.

<sup>94</sup>McKendrick, "Home Demand," p. 184, Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 221-2.

<sup>95</sup>Memoirs of a Serjeant, pp. 120-1, Fitchett (Harris), Wellington's Men, pp. 64-5, Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 202-4.

<sup>96</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 5, p. 54.

<sup>97</sup>Glover, Peninsular War, p. 113.

<sup>98</sup>Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, p. 134, Fitchett (Harris), op. cit., p. 190, Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 114-15, Glover, op. cit., pp. 79-80, 219-21.

<sup>99</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 122-3, 130, Gunn, "Memoirs," p. 99, Memoirs of a Serjeant, pp. 62-3, Harris, Recollections, pp. 84-5.

<sup>100</sup>Steevens, Reminiscences, pp. 71-3, Fitchett (Harris), op. cit., pp. 228-9, Harris, op. cit., pp. 64-5, 87-8.

<sup>101</sup>Steevens, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>102</sup>Adam Neale, "The Spanish Campaign of 1808," Constable's Miscellanies, XXVII (1828), 191.

<sup>103</sup>"Journal of a Soldier of the 72st Regt. (Highland Light Infantry) from 1808 to 1815," Constable's Miscellanies, XXVII (1828), 61.

<sup>104</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, p. 121.

<sup>105</sup>Harry Ross-Lewin, With the Thirty-Second in the Peninsula, John Wardell, ed. (Dublin: Hodges, Figges, 1904), p. 297.

<sup>106</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, p. 138, Sibbald, Memoirs, pp. 254-5.

<sup>107</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 7, pp. 238-9.

<sup>108</sup>Lawrence, Autobiography, p. 146, Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 4, pp. 925-6.

<sup>109</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 7, pp. 239-40. Sgt. Stevenson and Pvt. Wheeler, good sources, were Methodists. The Narrative of a Private Soldier (Glasgow: Young, Gallie, 1819) is more typical of Methodist memoirs. Half a dozen other pious sources proved unreadable. The trouble with such "witnesses" is that, for them, events are merely excuses for moralizing. Details are sketchy, times scrambled, and distortion for religiously dramatic purposes common.

<sup>110</sup>Stevenson, Soldier in Time of War, pp. 132-3, Longford, Wellington, pp. 212-13.

<sup>111</sup>Steevens, Reminiscences, p. 71, 73.

- 112 Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 202-4.
- 113 Ibid., p. 204.
- 114 Wellington, Supplementary Despatches, vol. 7, p. 195.
- 115 Victor Neuberg, Popular Education in Eighteenth Century England (London: Woburn Press, 1971), p. 149.
- 116 Davies, Wellington and his Army, pp. 144-5.
- 117 Fitchett (Harris), Wellington's Men, pp. 160-2.
- 118 Gleig, Subaltern, pp. 324-5.
- 119 Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 144-6.
- 120 Ross-Lewin, With the 32nd, pp. 188-9.
- 121 Bell, Rough Notes, p. 143.
- 122 Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 4, pp. 928-9.
- 123 Gleig, op. cit., pp. 324-6, Wheeler, Letters, pp. 140-1, Oman, Wellington's Army, p. 274, Brett-James, Life in Wellington's Army, p. 279.
- 124 Grattan, Adventures, vol. 1, pp. 193-4.
- 125 Fitchett (Anton), op. cit., p. 111.
- 126 Wellington, Supplementary Despatches, vol. 7, p. 447.
- 127 Fitchett (Anton), loc. cit., Gleig, op. cit., p. 113, Landmann, Recollections, pp. 154-5.
- 128 Bell, Rough Notes, p. 183.
- 129 Regimental Officer, p. 114, Harris, Recollections, p. 64.

## CHAPTER V

### WORKERS

Ivy Pinchbeck in Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution details every kind of women's work in the early industrial period, including the new wage-earning jobs created in the commercialization of agriculture. Under the traditional order, women had done a great deal of productive work in cottage industry and the family plot and common.

The wife of a squatter called up as a militia man, assured Arthur Young that she and her children would have perished had it not been for her land enclosed from the waste, on which she had grown wheat and rye and 'had also cabbages, potatoes and other things. <sup>130</sup>

Pinchbeck points out that the productive work of the wife in the preindustrial period did not bring steady, independent wages. The great advantage to women of the new factories was that their wages, came into their own hands for the first time. Legally the husband was still entitled to his wife's earnings but he could not squander them at the grog shop if he didn't see them. <sup>131</sup>

Neil McKendrick, working from the base of Pinchbeck's research and that of other students of women's work, develops the interesting thesis that the wages of women and children in this period provided surplus income to fuel the home market. The new consumer demand created the base for early industrial take-off. Textiles, pottery, and brewing, three early growth industries, burgeoned, he insists,

because of lower middle class and upper working class cash surpluses above subsistence.<sup>132</sup>

The war period, with the exception of dearth years and taking into account the inevitable price inflation, was generally a favorable period for labor--one clear explanation for the difficulty of recruiting in England which the military historians touch on vaguely, if at all. Ireland, lacking industrial development, supplied recruits to English as well as Irish regiments.<sup>133</sup>

Despite the heartening pattern of English employment for women, the women left behind by the regiments which sailed to the Peninsula would still have faced wages barely adequate to sustain life. So long as the family--husband, wife, children over six--were in full employment, the possibility of cash surplus existed. For the woman alone, or with young children, the economic prospect was dismal even in factory towns. As has already been mentioned, the embarkation ports were southern and the English regiments' permanent home bases lay in towns like Colchester and Hove, far from the manufacturing centers.<sup>134</sup>

Pinchbeck cites one pattern in industrial employment which explains the presence of some women with the army to begin with. Girls would be apprenticed in large numbers in textile factories. As soon as they became adults, they were released.

' . . . such truly unfortunate young Women, disperse themselves over the Country, and for want of friends or employ, prematurely and inconsiderately get married to, or more improperly associate themselves with Soldiers, or other loose and unstationary men. . . .'<sup>135</sup>

The majority of British people--and of British soldiers' families--were still rural, however, or living in small towns. Although the British women in the Peninsula included some women with industrial work experience, most had worked in agriculture or domestic service, still by far the largest employers of labor, male or female.

The work of women with the army can be divided into three categories for analysis: unpaid survival tasks, army-related support services for which the women were sometimes paid, and gainful employment. A fourth category--gain-motivated crime--which in some ways resembles work, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Another mode for analyzing work also suggested itself. Nearly every task women are reported as performing existed in multiple aspects. An extreme example is child nurture. Care of one's own children was considered a simple survival task, normal motherly behavior, and scarcely work at all. It could, however, become gainful employment when the children were someone else's. Susan Sibbald reports her efforts in garrison on Guernsey to find a nursemaid for her children among the soldiers' wives. She looked among the wives as a matter of course and does not seem to have considered other alternatives.<sup>136</sup>

Although division of work into the three categories listed in the first paragraph of this chapter seemed a clearer mode of discussion than a task-by-task analysis, the reader should keep in mind that the same task could be classified in the first category if performed for one's family without pay, in the second category if

the surgeon or another officer demanded the service, and in the third category if an officer hired the service for pay.

If one criterion for a woman's selection to travel with the army were her "usefulness" then she probably had basic skills as a sicknurse or laundress. Rural women or women with experience in domestic service would probably have been considered more "useful" than women whose work background was in factories. Contemporary critics of the factory system complained that girls employed as "hands" did not have a chance to develop basic skills of family management notably cooking, cleaning and mending. What these critics did not acknowledge, or perhaps realize, was that intensified commercial agriculture, by moving women from the family vegetable plot to the turnip field, also created skill-less women, and on a much larger scale than the factories. Nevertheless a countrywoman, if she could not be expected to cook well, would have a familiarity with plants and game animals--and probably with techniques of poaching the animals--that a factory hand could not hope to rival. The domestic servant with a rural background was ideally skilled for both subsistence tasks and gainful employment. The woman with experience of any work, however, was preferable to the unskilled homebody, for the mere act of going out into the community, of associating with strangers, especially with strange men, would have bred some degree of self-confidence. Above all, the woman with the army had to be adaptable.<sup>137</sup>

Of the first category of women's work, survival tasks, very little detail can be supplied because the memoirists give only



infrequent glimpses. The cooking of ration beef and the distribution of bread would have gone on in much the same fashion whether or not women were with the army. Schaumann provides an interesting look at the baking of large quantities of biscuit under commissariat direction in the 1808-9 campaign. He assembled the ingredients and hired Spanish women (probably not Spanish followers, but local women) to bake the biscuit for him. This factory-like production system represents the professionalizing of supply, imperfectly developed but showing the direction in which the supply branch of the army would grow--toward efficiency and monotony.<sup>138</sup>

Grains used for ration-bread (primarily wheat) were largely imported by the army in later days--from England, from North America, and from North Africa--because of the collapse of Portuguese agriculture and the depredations of the French armies in Spain. English soldiers and their wives were accustomed to wheat bread, though the meat ration must have seemed luxurious to many. When wheat bread or biscuit and meat, preferably beef, were not forthcoming, English soldiers were apt to grumble. Scots (and northern English) soldiers' families were accustomed to oatmeal porridge or oatcakes and the Irish to potatoes. All British soldiers regarded rice with distrust and barley with disdain. Their wives, for whom the cooking of rice may have been a baffling task, probably felt the same.<sup>139</sup>

Toward ration bread--and possibly also toward the meat--the women stood in as passive a relationship as any soldier. The women

may or may not have helped cook the meat. They did not bake the bread because they had no ovens. Bread was bought locally or shipped to the army in the form of biscuit. By contrast with the French particularly, British soldiers were improvident about food and unskilled in camp cookery. They could not be trusted with more than three days' biscuit issue. They would eat it up at once, or trade it for drink and complain of hunger. Whether British soldiers' wives were equally profligate with their ration is not known. They did spend considerable effort in supplementing the ration.<sup>140</sup>

The women's donkeys gave them mobility and made it possible for them to carry cooking utensils more efficient and lighter than the enormous iron pots issued to companies, which consumed vast quantities of fuel in a land where fuel was scarce. Potatoes, olives, onions, cabbage, beans, maize, grapes, chickens, fish, both salt and fresh, pigs, rabbits, and sausage are foods--all non-ration items--which are mentioned as entering the otherwise monotonous diet of the army through the agency of followers. When there was cash to be had and officers watching, these items were bought. Dickering for food in a seller's market must have required skills of persuasion as well as money management. Women obtained food for their husbands as well as for themselves and their children, and sometimes brought it out to the men on duty.<sup>141</sup>

Clothing also must have demanded ingenuity and local trading. Soldiers were theoretically issued new clothing once a year and shoes rather oftener. It is fortunate that Wellington was not a spit-and-polish general, for replacement of scarlet wool would have

been difficult locally. Wellington apparently cared little for the irregularities in his soldiers' dress so long as they weren't got up as French hussars. Consequently trousers in particular were seldom regulation, even among officers. The latter took perverse delight in wearing any kind of jacket except the scarlet tunic, if they could afford to, an example being provided in the person of the commander-in-chief who appeared on the field in the latter part of the war in the sky blue of the Hatfield hunt. Other less exalted examples abound, and the soldiers, by the time they entered France, looked like vagabonds.<sup>142</sup>

Of the women's clothing, an officer of the King's German Legion records that it was "neat and cleanly" except in dire circumstances. Apart from that it is difficult to say how they and their children were clothed. There is no evidence of clothing being sent out for the women. Harris describes them as dressed in a motley of men's jackets and local garb, not an improbability though no other general descriptions of their appearance survive. George Bell presents Mother Skiddy in a very white apron at the end of his narrative. All that can be deduced about the garb she wore under the apron is that it wasn't white and was probably cleanly, that is tidy, if not clean. More information exists in the sources on the clothing of Portuguese, Spanish, French, and even Basque women, than on the clothing of the women with the army.<sup>143</sup>

Frustrating as this lack of information is, it is reasonable to suppose that wives mended and cleaned their own and their children's clothing. Although soldiers in the field were expected

to take care of their own uniforms (cobblers were provided in the regiment) those who had wives probably expected the women to take over that task, at least in part.

In the matters of food and clothing it will be seen that the role of the wife was supplementary to a system of supply intended to serve all soldiers, married and unmarried. The wife could materially increase her husband's comfort, but the majority of soldiers functioned without wives. The women's survival tasks, then, were not crucial to the army but to themselves and their children.

Two basic wifely activities, food supply and clothing supply and maintenance, had by the beginning of the nineteenth century been partially institutionalized and professionalized. The commissariat was inefficient, its ration issue dull and sometimes inadequate, its organization a bizarre compromise between military and civilian interests, but as the war progressed it came to serve its clientele more adequately. Supply of shoes, blankets, greatcoats and uniforms was, and had been for some time, a regimental matter. The colonel had the clothing concession. Stoppages were made from soldiers' pay for shoes and clothing, and the colonel contracted for those items. It was to his advantage to delay buying the clothing in order to keep the interest on the money, and indifferent or unscrupulous colonels often bought shoddy goods. The important point is, however, that they, like the commissaries, bought in bulk. Adequate quality controls came much later.<sup>144</sup>

This movement in the direction of mass, professionalized services which would eventually render the support role of wives

redundant is seen most clearly in medical care. Nursing the sick and wounded is the single most important task in the second category of work, which also included foraging parties under the direction of officers, fuel gathering for the camp kettles, and other involuntary tasks associated with sewing, cleaning and mending clothes for others outside the family. Foraging, because of the opportunities it provided for crime, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nursing was sometimes involuntary and might or might not be paid for. Women with the army were expected to perform nursing tasks, though no effort was made to train or organize their efforts.

James McGrigor, Wellington's Surgeon General, brought hospital-style sick care into the Peninsular army to an unprecedented degree. Convalescent hospitals well back from the field of action were customary. McGrigor organized field hospitals and would have set up field ambulance services if he had been allowed to do so by army administration. It is no accident that the first commendation of doctors in a British battle dispatch occurred in this war (McGrigor suggested it and Wellington wrote it after the battle of Salamanca in 1812). McGrigor stressed cleanliness, elementary sanitation and proper diet in his efforts to reduce the appalling sick list. He enforced the new requirement that surgeons be licensed and mates have medical training, and increased the use of designated orderlies in his field hospitals. "Peruvian bark," that is, quinine, began to be dispensed for malaria and the pharmacopia was

rationalized. During McGrigor's service in the Peninsula the surgeons and mates were firmly established as officers.<sup>145</sup>

McGrigor was an admirable and efficient administrator so that, wretched as medical care of the sick and wounded still was, their treatment in general must be seen as an improvement over what they had received before his coming in 1811. It is thus doubly strange that he paid so little attention to sick-nursing.

Nursing the wounded was a task carried on variously by professional medics, by the soldiers' comrades, by their wives, and by a random and temporary collection of followers and civilians. Local nuns, for example, nursed the wounded after Busaco, and other instances occur of civilian women organizing to nurse the wounded.<sup>146</sup> One source describes a local nursing effort:

In Salamanca, the female inhabitants had prepared a great quantity of lint and rags for the use of the wounded, and displayed a feeling of humanity which was no less creditable to them than pleasing to us. Numbers also repaired to the field of battle, carrying with them tea, coffee, and such other refreshments as they thought would be most acceptable: and here might be seen the interesting spectacle of Spanish girls supporting from the field such of our wounded as were able to walk, carrying for them their knapsacks and muskets.<sup>147</sup>

The total failure to organize nursing services was an administrative blindspot. In the American Revolution, General Howe had the power to order women with the army to the field to nurse the wounded, and it is hard to believe that Wellington could not have done so, if McGrigor had asked him to. For that matter, certain soldiers in each company could have been designated ahead of time as stretcher-bearers.<sup>148</sup>

As it was, a soldier wounded in battle was dependent on the good nature of his comrades and the soft-heartedness of his officers for the most elementary attention. If the action were fierce, or a general advance or retreat were ordered, he might or might not be carried to the rear. After a battle parties of soldiers were detailed to find the wounded and carry them to the surgeon's tent. These stretcher-bearers (when they had stretchers) were tired from the fighting, resentful, totally untrained and frequently negligent if a prospect of loot (a dead officer in the vicinity, for example) presented itself.<sup>149</sup>

Thus a wounded soldier's best hope of survival was to have a close friend or a wife who would search the field for him specifically, bring him water, and see to it that he was taken to the surgeon immediately. Wives were not more efficient at this task than soldiers. Being in the rear with the baggage train during the battle, wives were slower than comrades and most accounts of wounds in the memoirs show soldiers helped from the field by friends.

A friend, however, might be ordered to move on, might himself be injured, or might, in the case of a siege, dash off in search of drink or loot. Wives searched for their husbands, stayed with them, oversaw their care. What the wife lacked in speed she made up for in attentiveness. Certainly she expected and was expected to nurse her own husband, once the surgeon had seen to his immediate treatment. This expectation was shared by both officers' and soldiers' wives.<sup>150</sup>

Soldiers' wives performed general nursing tasks as well. In the siege of Cádiz, for example, Mrs. Reston not only carried ammunition, she also tended the wounded under fire. A soldier's wife was killed at Salamanca bringing water to wounded men. Bringing water and food, seeing to medication and cleanliness--the tasks, in short, of a practical nurse--seem also to have been expected of women in field hospitals when women were available. They did not always rise to the expectation. Cooper describes the indifference with which one such nurse, the wife of a man of his regiment, met his pleas for something to drink when he was ill with a fever. Orderlies, themselves frequently convalescents, seem often to have been indifferent and inefficient also.<sup>151</sup> Adam Blenkinsop provides an un-Nightingale-like look at followers as nurses in Spain:

Among them (the wounded) went about hard-featured, ferocious looking women, both Spanish and English, joking and swearing, and mocking at the sufferers, while nevertheless they attended to them in a rough fashion.<sup>152</sup>

An officer, of course, had a ready-made nurse in the person of his *bâtman*, or soldier-servant. Though cases occurred, the wounded officer was also less likely to be abandoned on the field than the soldier, for his men could be ordered to carry him to the rear, and if that failed, his servant was supposed to search for him.

After Badajoz, William Grattan, who was wounded, was brought from the surgeon to his own tent to be attended by his servant, Dan Carsons. Carsons and his wife, Nelly, were found to be drunk.



Indeed, their well-meaning but bumbling attempts to help Grattan amused him so much he nearly died to death laughing at them, a fine instance of the pitfalls of comedy. An officer might hire a soldier's wife or widow as a sick-nurse, though Grattan (and Carsons) plainly expected Nelly Carsons to nurse Grattan without pay.<sup>153</sup>

A seriously wounded man (soldier or officer) might be sent to Belém, a considerable distance from most of the battlefields, once his injuries had been attended to. Unlike the French, the British army did not have field ambulances, so the wounded who could not walk were conveyed in the same unsprung carts that had carried supplies forward, a practice that killed many of them. A high ranking officer, if wounded, might expect to be carried on a litter, but lieutenants and ensigns either rode in the supply carts or, if they were able, rode on their horses. Davies quotes the story of one officer's encounter with a blinded soldier walking in the company of his wife and two children to Lisbon where a transport would take them home. The soldier often stumbled, so the officer, moved by his plight, procured river passage on the Mondego for him. Simmons mentions the smooth water passage as an enormous relief after riding, wounded, in one of the supply carts. After Vitoria, the chief field hospital moved north and, for the 1814 campaign, was established at St. Jean de Luz, where treatment was apparently relatively quick and good.<sup>154</sup>

The gaps in medical care--between the time a man was hit or fell ill and his first treatment, and between first

treatment and convalescence in the main hospitals--strike the reader as surprising lack of planning. Experience must have shown that many men died of the ordeal of waiting for treatment. Be that as it may, it was in those organizational gaps that the wife could prove most useful to her husband, and to the army.

As with food preparation, however, the wife's nursing function was gradually being made redundant by increasing professionalism. McGrigor himself expressed unmistakeable contempt for soldiers' wives.<sup>155</sup> He did not mention their nursing role in his diary, though it is amply attested to in other memoirs. In England his professional colleagues of the period were driving experienced women from the practice of midwifery on the grounds of their lack of theory, while refusing to provide the theory.<sup>156</sup>

There is no question that professionalization of medical support services eventually proved a great blessing to the British army, but a little attention to the training and morale of the convalescents and wives who acted as practical nurses in the Peninsula could have improved the level of medical care quickly and cheaply. As it was soldiers' wives, whether devoted or indifferent nurses, groped in ignorance for the right thing to do. The professionals, of course, were groping, too.

Nursing of one's husband, a wifely service, indeed one of the most fundamental services a wife could render her husband, was voluntary and unpaid. Wives of convalescent soldiers in hospital areas or winter quarters might be directed to perform nursing tasks for other men. They were expected to make themselves useful in

return for their ration and willingness to act as a nurse was consistently listed as a criterion for their selection to accompany the army in the first place.<sup>157</sup>

For the third category of work, gainful employment, references include a variety of tasks. An officer might hire a soldier's wife as maidservant and dueña for his wife, as Harry Smith hired Jenny Bates to look after Juana Smith's needs. Susan Sibbald records soldiers' wives in garrison being hired as cooks and children's nurses. Col. Lejeune's portrait of the captain's family on campaign suggests that the maidservant/nanny role was carried to the Peninsula, and August Schaumann hired a dragoon's wife to cook for him.<sup>158</sup>

The prescribed role of officers' laundress is exemplified in Bell's accounts of Mother Skiddy, and other women also figured as washerwomen, though not always professionally. Women with the army were hired as housekeepers and caterers in winter quarters. One enterprising Irishwoman ran a hotel in Lisbon for officers, although she did not follow the army on campaign. Mrs. O'Neil, the sergeant-major's wife mentioned in Grattan, was hired at one time as manager of an officers' mess, although she figures more prominently as a sutler.<sup>159</sup>

Most of these jobs were simple extensions of domestic service and are chiefly interesting because of the physical difficulties attendant upon performing the tasks on the move. Laundering, for example, required soap and hot water, neither of which were supplied. Soap could be bought locally but hot water required fuel and fuel

was very scarce. Thus a laundress encountered problems in procuring supplies and fuelgathering which the sedentary washerwoman in England did not experience. The officers' laundress with the army could not be expected to carry flatirons with her on the march, though she probably used them in winter quarters. Cooks would have experienced similar difficulties and the added problem of serious male competition. There were French chefs among the prisoners, and the Englishwoman's reputation for cooking was not high. Schaumann, who paid serious attention to food, preferred sleeping with his English cook to eating her meals.<sup>160</sup>

Soldiers' wives were drawn from a level of society whose diet consisted largely of bakery bread, boiled potatoes or turnips, onions, and an occasional bit of bacon, cheese, or salt fish for flavoring. Such a menu does not make for inspired cooking and even if the woman had seen domestic service she was more likely to have been a scullery maid or a maid of all work than a cook. Scots and Irishwomen with the army were even less likely to have developed their cooking skills. Nor were the tastes of soldiers and most officers of inferior rank sophisticated. One diarist describes with pity a Spanish family eating what is obviously paella and a horror of garlic and olive oil recurs throughout the memoirs of officers and soldiers alike.<sup>161</sup> Thus a colonel or general, accustomed at home to a more elevated or exotic cuisine, might well search among the prisoners for a chef. Boiled beef and weevily biscuit must eventually have lost their charm.

Work as a sutler or vivandera requires further explanation. A sutler was, to some extent, a relic of the time before organized

commissariats existed (pre-18th century), for the primary function and oldest meaning of sutler, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, was a victualler to soldiers in the field, that is, a purveyor of food and drink. Many sutlers were men, and the drunkenness of all sutlers (male and female) was proverbial in the army. Men as well as women were considered followers and kept to the baggage train.<sup>162</sup>

Although the commissariat supplied the basic ration, sutlers continued to provide the army with food. Some sold hard-to-obtain items like pepper, tea, sugar, fruit compotes and other potted foods, and some medicines like Peruvian bark. Officers might order good port or brandy, through a sutler. These were expensive goods, beyond the reach of most soldiers. Other, undercapitalized, sutlers dealt in cheap wines, local produce, eggs, cheese, cured meats--common items only remarkable because they were hard to buy when the line of march took the army away from settled areas and market towns. But a sutler was often also an itinerant pedlar of drygoods--needles, soap, toothpowder, shaving mirrors, buttons, insignia of rank, and so on. Ivy Pinchbeck describes the wives of soldiers left behind by the regiment as among unlicensed pedlars of trinkets jailed for vagrancy. ". . . many women left destitute by the death of the husbands or by their enlisting for the wars, took to the roads with a box of goods in the hope of making a living."<sup>163</sup> Street vending, a major woman's occupation in London and the other large towns, may have provided work for some of the urban women who followed the army before they left England. In the Peninsula,

an enterprising woman with a donkey could make a good income as a sutler.

Sutlers did not have a high reputation for honesty or sobriety. Their prices were generally as high as the traffic would bear, but they performed a useful service. Mrs. O'Neil, before her donkey was shot in the Burgos retreat, was a respected entrepreneur. Two memoirists cite soldiers' widows as sutlers. For the self-confident woman with some savings who was disinclined to remarry, work as a sutler provided a good solution to her economic dilemma. She could remain feme sole and still follow in the baggage train among her friends.<sup>164</sup>

So long as a woman's work followed the pattern of traditional domestic services she could expect increasing competition from the professional support services of the army itself. Subsistence food-gathering and preparation grew less important as the commissariat increased in efficiency. Her husband's clothing was supplied by the regiment, though she was called on to mend and clean it and sometimes to improvise replacements for outworn garments. As medical service improved and male orderlies were assigned to hospital duty, her general nursing function shrank in importance. The survival tasks, then, became more a matter of tending to her own needs and her children's and less of supplying her husband with services he could now obtain from the army itself.

Where army support services were inadequate the working wife's value increased. As a skilled cook, laundress, caterer, housekeeper, or domestic servant, she could earn respectable,

though not always reliable, wages. Her uncertainty in this paid role is nicely illustrated by Mother Skiddy's reaction when George Bell finally came to pay her for doing his laundry for a year.

I bid this wonderful structure of humanity a friendly farewell, after squaring a long account with her for about a year's washing and darning. She was reluctant to take anything, saying, "O, sir, sure you always belonged to me own company, an' you're welcome to the bit av washing."<sup>165</sup>

Clearly Mother Skiddy's nurturant, service orientation warred with her sense of herself as a paid and skilled worker. Or perhaps she just had good manners and a kind heart.

The woman of enterprise, determination, and independent sense of self could make a good living as a sutler and this role, so long as the ration remained scanty and monotonous, was not yet seriously threatened by institutional encroachment. All other work was.

## CHAPTER V

### ENDNOTES

<sup>130</sup>Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850 (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), pp. 20-21. The chapter on Workers draws on many of the same sources listed at the beginning of the chapter on Wives, notably Pinchbeck, McKendrick, "Home Demand and Economic Growth," G. E. and K. R. Fussell, The English Countrywoman, a Farmhouse Social History A.D. 1500-1900 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971), J. Jean Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956) and E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). In addition, J. D. Chambers and G. E. Mingay, The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880 (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), was helpful on women's agricultural work and on agricultural labour in general.

<sup>131</sup>Pinchbeck, op. cit., p. 309, McKendrick, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>132</sup>McKendrick, op. cit., pp. 201-2, 208-9.

<sup>133</sup>Glover, Peninsular War, p. 38.

<sup>134</sup>Pinchbeck, Women Workers, p. 155, 178.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>136</sup>Sibbald, Memoirs, pp. 288-90, 294-5.

<sup>137</sup>Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, p. 243, Stevenson, Soldier in Time of War, p. 174, Pinchbeck, op. cit., pp. 63-4, 310-11.

<sup>138</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, p. 84.

<sup>139</sup>Davies, Wellington and his Army, pp. 74-5, F. P. Robinson, "A Peninsular Brigadier," C. T. Atkinson, ed., Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, XXXIV (1956), 159.

<sup>140</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 5, p. 13, 34-5, Davies, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>141</sup>Robert Garrett, "A Subaltern in the Peninsular War," A. S. White, ed., Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research,



XIII (1934), pp. 4, 10, Kincaid, Adventures in the Rifle Brigade, pp. 170-3, Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, p. 247, Surtees, 25 Years with the Rifle Brigade, pp. 196-7.

<sup>142</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 8, pp. 378-9, Longford, Wellington, p. 340, John Carss, "The 2/53rd in the Peninsular War, Contemporary Letters from an Officer of the Regiment," S. H. F. Johnson, ed., Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, XXVI (1948), 9, Kincaid, op. cit., pp. 35-6, 292.

<sup>143</sup>KGL Officer, p. 177, Fitchett (Harris), op. cit., p. 201, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 143.

<sup>144</sup>F. Wiener, Civilians under Military Justice, pp. 190-1, Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 4, pp. 899-902.

<sup>145</sup>Davies, op. cit., pp. 79-82, Fortescue, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 923-5.

<sup>146</sup>KGL Officer, pp. 248-9.

<sup>147</sup>Commissary, p. 140.

<sup>148</sup>Barker, "Diary," pp. 149-52.

<sup>149</sup>Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 153-4, Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 143-5.

<sup>150</sup>Sgt. B., p. 83, Costello, loc. cit., H. Smith, Autobiography, p. 89, Davies, Wellington and his Army, pp. 134-5.

<sup>151</sup>Donaldson, Eventful Life, pp. 67-8, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 125, p. 35.

<sup>152</sup>Adam Blenkinsop, Memoirs, vol. 1 (London: Bentley, 1852), pp. 160-1. Nursing in England probably resembled nursing in the Peninsula, as Blenkinsop describes it:

<sup>153</sup>Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, pp. 9-12, Fitchett (Anton), Wellington's Men, p. 256.

<sup>154</sup>Davies, op. cit., p. 147, Simmons, British Rifleman, pp. 142-8, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 35.

<sup>155</sup>James McGrigor, The Autobiography and Services of Sir James McGrigor (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861), pp. 236-7, 256, 277.

<sup>156</sup>Pinchbeck, Women Workers, pp. 304-5.

<sup>157</sup>Fitchett (Anton), op. cit., p. 111, Patterson, Adventures, pp. 79-80.

<sup>158</sup>H. Smith, Autobiography, p. 172, Sibbald, Memoirs, p. 290, Wheeler, Letters, p. 101, Schaumann, On the Road, p. 267.

<sup>159</sup>Bell, Rough Notes, p. 183, Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, pp. 161-2, 166, Schaumann, op. cit., pp. 222-3.

<sup>160</sup>Schaumann, op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>161</sup>Simmons, op. cit., p. 279, Longford, Wellington, p. 202

<sup>162</sup>Larpent, Private Journal, vol. 2, p. 180, Costello, Military Memoirs, p. 25, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 8.

<sup>163</sup>Pinchbeck, op. cit., p. 298.

<sup>164</sup>Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, p. 166, Costello, op. cit., p. 138, Twelve Years' Military Adventures, 2 vols. (London: Colburn, 1829), I, 227.

<sup>165</sup>Bell, Rough Notes, p. 183.

## CHAPTER VI

### CRIMINALS

The segment of society from which soldiers and their wives were drawn, whether urban or rural, existed on the fringe of respectability. It was relatively easy to move from the poor-and-respectable class to vagabondage and thence to crime under the pressure of economic need. Debtors were still jailed and sentences for petty crimes still extreme. Relative to the middle of the eighteenth century and of the nineteenth, the war years were a low-crime period. Nevertheless, London (still policeless), the cramped industrial centers, and the changing villages produced pickpockets, beggars, whores, thieves and poachers in plentiful numbers. Studies of women as criminals in the war period are inadequate. Although most crimes were not sex-linked, women's criminality in the early industrial period is usually discussed in terms of prostitution. Male prostitution, though it must have existed, is rarely mentioned. In the early industrial period, some women were whores. They were also murderers, thieves, fences, pickpockets and beggars. Some of these criminally inclined women may have sailed to the Peninsula with the British army; other women became criminals in the course of the war.<sup>166</sup>

As with economic background, evidence for criminality in the army in general is most easily derived from information available about soldiers rather than their wives. Some men were given the

choice of prison or the army, some were enlisted from jails, and some enlisted as an alternative to transportation. After the reform of 1806 which allowed militiamen to enlist in the regular army, a more settled class of recruits, mostly rural laborers, entered the ranks, but the army also continued to recruit in the old-fashioned drink-and-bounty way described in the chapter on Wives. Some of these recruits and some of their wives were of the "criminal class." It is not surprising, therefore, to find a good deal of criminal conduct occurring in the wake of the Peninsular army, some of it attributed to soldiers' wives.<sup>167</sup>

The British army in the Peninsula fought in friendly territory until it crossed into France (October 1813). French armies supplied themselves by living off the country, but they paid a high price in casualties at the hands of both Spanish and Portuguese peasants, many of whom became guerrilleros because of French depredations. From the beginning the British were directed to behave as if they were in England and to pay for everything they took. This was an ideal to aim for, impossible to achieve in reality, but they had to try.<sup>168</sup>

Wellington was a strict disciplinarian, criticized at the time and later for using flogging to excess. He was anxious to keep his army within bounds, for he did not have the numbers to overawe a hostile countryside. He believed, perhaps wrongly, that flogging and hanging were necessary to maintain discipline. With five French soldiers in the Peninsula for every British soldier, discipline was an urgent military necessity, not just an autocratic preference.<sup>169</sup>

When the British army entered France, the situation became even more delicate. Had the countryside risen behind them as they marched inland, Wellington's regiments could have been cut off from their supply lines and from all hope of retreat to the coast. Wellington named his brother-in-law, Edward Pakenham, provost marshal, with instructions to prevent pillage and rape by summary flogging and hanging, if necessary. However abhorrent the punishments may seem they apparently worked. French civilians did not take up arms.<sup>170</sup>

Instead, charmed by the novelty of soldiers who paid for things, French and Basque peasants began to do a brisk, happy business in the rear of the army, bourgeois fathers allowed their daughters to dance with English officers, discriminating Frenchwomen made promenading with Irish soldiers fashionable, and everybody fell in love. An air of relief, even euphoria, when they found they would not have to deal with French guerrillas, pervades the memoirists' recollections. Wellington was not the only one to perceive the advantage of discipline.<sup>171</sup>

This military context must be kept in mind in considering the kinds of crimes British followers did commit in the Peninsula and the punishments some of them suffered.

Women with the army in the field were subject to martial law under an Article of War promulgated in 1742 and reissued in 1746.<sup>172</sup>

All Suttlers and Retainers to a Camp, and all Persons whatsoever Serving with Our Armys in the Field, tho' no inlisted Soldiers, are to be Subject to Orders, according to the Rules and Discipline of War.<sup>173</sup>

Earlier Articles of War referring to women and other camp followers can be found.<sup>174</sup> However, according to Frederick Wiener, the constitutional history of the British army does not extend further back than the first Mutiny Act (1689).

. . . it is not helpful doctrinally to explore the practices of any period earlier than the one when the standing army was first legalized by Parliament, of the years when military trials of even undoubted soldiers were deemed illegal.<sup>175</sup>

Thus, any consideration of crimes and punishments involving women with the army stands in a fairly recent legal framework, though the crimes, at least, were ancient.

In controlling the behavior of the Peninsular army in the field the distinction between discipline and punishment was not always clear, for punishments were often exemplary, that is, designed not to administer justice to the individual but to warn the offender's friends against similar acts. An account of the Light Brigade's retreat to Vigo (1808-9), for example, shows General Craufurd insisting on the flogging of a looter while the man's regiment was forced to watch the punishment and listen to Craufurd's homily on the consequences of lack of discipline.<sup>176</sup> Nor were authorities always scrupulous as to the guilt of the offender. The object was to provide an example. This arbitrary quality was not unique to military justice, but in the Peninsula it was marked.

Although one soldier's wife, a Jane Richards, was brought before a general court martial during the Peninsular war, no record of her trial can be found and, indeed, only thirty-four civilians with the army (including commissaries and surgeons) were tried

before a general court martial in the course of the war. Justice was also administered through regimental courts martial and the Provost Marshal had the power to punish anyone found in the commission of a crime summarily, that is, without trial. Women were punished for crimes committed in the course of the war and their punishments included hanging and flogging, but outside the recollections of memoirists and Wellington's letters to Lady Salisbury little formal record remains of these events. There are, however, many recollections.<sup>177</sup>

Some work that women did provided circumstances in which the commission of crimes against property or crimes of gain was relatively easy. A woman or band of women out foraging for fodder for their donkeys, for example, might easily be tempted to take a truss of hay without paying for it, especially if the owner were not present. Scrounging for food, legitimate in wilderness areas but criminal in cultivated regions, was common. It is hard to regard such acts, committed when rations were short and pay in arrears, as crimes, until one considers the real damage large numbers of scroungers could do to an agricultural economy already under severe strain from requisitions by commissaries and the pressure of displaced civilian populations. Women who stole from gardens and fields were almost always poor and hungry. So were the peasants who cultivated the gardens.

Wellington was fully aware that short rations and no pay produced crimes.

. . . a starving army is actually worse than none.  
The soldiers lose their discipline and their spirit.

They plunder even in the presence of their officers.  
 The officers are <sup>178</sup>discontented, and are almost as bad  
 as the men. . . .

Furthermore, so long as parties of soldiers or followers were allowed to straggle from the main body under inadequate supervision from officers, chiefly subalterns, whose duty it was to keep them in order, pillage was bound to occur. Wellington inveighed against slack junior officers as well as the pilferers, and, indeed, it was not just a matter of inattention. Some officers condoned this sort of crime.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to vegetables of various kinds, pigs and fowls were constantly being stolen. Schaumann mentions turkeys, and Kincaid gives an amusing portrait of three women of the King's German Legion--pipesmokers, strong as horses, all over six feet tall--who had obviously "often thrashed a better man than me in the course of their military career."<sup>180</sup> He had bought some live hens from a farmhouse for his dinner but his horse objected to carrying them and threw Kincaid on his head. The hens escaped and the KGL women had already rounded them up and concealed them by the time Kincaid recovered his horse. He ended up paying half a dollar (a large sum) for birds he had already bought because, he admits frankly, the women scared him.<sup>181</sup>

Vandalism was common, particularly in cold weather when fuel was scarce. During the Coruña retreat, British soldiers and their wives ransacked Benevente Castle of priceless furniture, using it for fuel. Their cookfires in the courtyard blackened the walls and the women hung their laundry everywhere. Unattended property was also



looted in the withdrawal to the Lines of Torres Vedras and the Burgos retreat. Wine, of course, was appropriated whenever found, but wine casks were valuable property and a General Order forbidding the destruction of wine casks for fuel had to be issued in 1810. It was followed by another prohibiting windows, doors, and house timbers from being pulled down for fuel. George Bell describes a French chateau vandalized and left to be occupied by camp followers, "the worst of all enemies" of property.<sup>182</sup>

Casual plunder sometimes involved theft of items from billets upon which soldiers and their wives were quartered, a crime against hospitality. Juana Smith was so embarrassed by her servant's theft of a china slop basin from a lady upon whom they had been billeted that she rode thirty miles in one day accompanied only by her groom to return the piece. Others were less scrupulous. However slack some officers might be about casual plunder and however needful the thieves occasionally were, Wellington did not take the matter lightly. The Provost Marshal and the regimental courts martial were kept busy. Most of the culprits were men, but Cooper records a woman flogged for theft and Schaumann a soldier's wife hanged for stealing flour.<sup>183</sup>

One form of theft appears to have been customary, not just casual--the looting of the wounded and dead after a battle. Sgt. Lawrence provides an illustration of the matter-of-fact attitude toward this grisly activity, which did not entirely deaden the more generous impulses. Lawrence's attitude is so extraordinary he has to be quoted in full. In the course of looting the dead after a battle he had come upon a dying French soldier.

He entreated me to stay with him, but I only did so as long as I found it convenient: I saw, too, that he could not last long, and very little sympathy could be expected from me then; so I ransacked his pockets and knapsack, and found a piece of pork ready cooked and three or four pounds of bread, which I thought would be very acceptable. The poor fellow asked me to leave him a portion, so I cut off a piece of bread and meat. . . . I then asked him if he had any money, to which he replied no, but not feeling quite satisfied at that, I again went through his pockets. I found ten rounds of ball cartridge. . . .but those I would not give carriage to. However, I found his purse at last, which contained seven Spanish dollars and seven shillings, all of which I put into my pocket except one shilling, which I returned to the poor dying man. . . .<sup>184</sup>

Like Sgt. Lawrence, women with the army did not shrink from robbing the dead and dying. Some memoirists insist that followers, male and female, were wolves for this kind of plunder. ". . . they strip the deserted and expiring wounded on the field of battle, and would willingly sell their bodies, could they find purchasers."<sup>185</sup> Looting the dead was undeniably a widespread practice among followers and seems to have been systematic and thorough--almost like a job.

Gleig gives a general picture of the ghastly process which happened so rapidly the "harpies" were rarely caught in the act. When the women were drunk, they sometimes forgot that they had come to the field to inquire after their husbands. They were "transformed into something more like fiends than angels of mercy." An English officer in the Portuguese service blamed sutlers, many of them soldiers' wives or widows, for most of this ghoulish form of robbery.<sup>186</sup>

An officer of hussars makes the "fiends," transformed by drink, into something worse.

Some of these delicate creatures are very Belonas in look and character . . . who from the best and purest motives visited the fields of battle and put the wounded, from sheer humanity, out of their pain, not however forgetting to requite their good actions by subsequently taking their purses.<sup>187</sup>

One anecdote exists to suggest that this extraordinary charge was more than slander. Landmann, early in the war, came across a woman in the act of killing a wounded man, or at least trying to stun him with a stone. As Landmann stopped, frozen in horror, a soldier from one of the German regiments, also a looter, came up and blew the woman's head off with his musket, saying as he did so that she was no "fouman," that is, foeman or combatant, and had no right to gain by the wounded man's death.<sup>188</sup>

At this point the question of crimes committed in the wake of the army takes on a degree of moral complexity that requires closer scrutiny. Looting the dead--and killing wounded man in order to rob them--cannot be construed as "normal" crime in the context of the parent culture. It is a special crime bred in the special circumstances of war. Other forms of criminal behavior also derive from war conditions.

When King Joseph's baggage train was captured after the battle of Vitoria, the army, the followers in particular, and some regiments, indulged in an orgy of looting. Three cities were also sacked by British troops in the course of sieges--Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, and San Sebastián. Women followers, not just men, took part in these carnivals of crime, most notably in the Vitoria plunder and the sack of Badajoz. The question goes beyond crime, to atrocity, war-crime.

The memoirists are more open in their reports of atrocities committed by the French and by Spanish guerrillas than they are about British outrages. A brief examination of comments on French atrocity may help to clarify what the term meant in the minds of observers.

All the memoirists who witnessed the retreat of Marshal Masséna from the Lines of Torres Vedras (spring, 1811) mention French brutality to Portuguese civilians. A fairly typical entry occurs in Edward Pakenham's letters:

The debased ingenuity of man, when converted to human torment, could hardly be supposed capable of suggesting the acts of horror actually committed by these fiends of hell;--every Village and Town has been set fire to, all peasants taken have been killed in the most cruel manner, the women, nay even females from childhood violated; if these Atrocities, and the brilliant instances of successful resistance cannot awaken the Manly feelings of Europe to a desperate and unceasing Resistance, the world's population must prepare for degradation unknown till the days of Napoleon's Tyranny, and Massena's accession to Princely power. . . .<sup>189</sup>

Similar generalizations may be found in other accounts. The gist of the comments seems to be that the level of brutality had risen past some invisible mark of what was tolerable in war, as if there were some territory of permissible crime beyond which an army ought not to venture. Pakenham's remarks are general, however. He uses the term "Atrocities." What was meant by the word at the time?

Two Riflemen, John Kincaid and George Simmons, provide separate versions of a specific outrage, written down a few days after Pakenham's letter, which may be taken as an example of what horrified contemporaries.

Kincaid's story is straightforward and crisp, but may be a second-hand account:

On taking possession of one of the villages which they (the French) had just evacuated, we found the body of a well-dressed female, whom they had murdered by a horrible refinement in cruelty. She had been placed upon her back, alive, in the middle of the street, with the fragment of a rock upon her breast, which it required four of our men to remove.<sup>190</sup>

Simmons' eyewitness account is full of circumstantial detail.

He was a surgeon by training, which gives weight to his description of the woman's condition.

In a village in front of Guarda, named Carapeta, I saw a woman laid in the street near her own door, murdered. The ruffians had placed upon her bosom a huge piece of granite taken from the market cross, so heavy that it took me and six men to remove it. The blood was running from her ears and mouth. Her dress upwards was most respectable, but her lower habiliments had been dragged off her. A peasant informed me that she was the wife of the juiz de fore of the village (that is the Mayor).<sup>191</sup>

This incident, though it illustrates the general climate of brutality toward women, does not bear directly upon the experience of women following the British army (though, if they witnessed it, it probably gave them nightmares). It does, however, clarify what observers had in mind when they used terms like outrage and atrocity. Looting the dead, though disgusting, was not atrocious in this sense, though killing the wounded was. The plunder of King Joseph's baggage train was outrageous, the sack of the besieged cities definitely atrocious. Women from the army participated in these special kinds of crime.

In the case of the aftermath of Vitoria part of the sense of outrage derived from purely military causes. Regiments turned aside

from a crucial pursuit of the fleeing French army to plunder. The men of other, better disciplined units felt that it was unjust that the undisciplined and undutiful were rewarded with loot while they, who had stuck to their duty, went empty-handed. Followers, both male and female, were deeply resented. They had not borne the risks of battle, yet they were rewarded. As for the baggage train, it was a legitimate spoil of war. There were rules for distributing spoils to the victors, however, and the rules had been broken.<sup>192</sup>

. . . .the people who contribute most to the victory . . . profit the least by it: not that I am an advocate for plunder--on the contrary, I would much rather that all our fighting was for pure love; but as everything of value falls into the hands of the followers, and scoundrels who skulk from the ranks for the double purpose of plundering and saving their dastardly carcasses, what I regret is, that the man who deserts his post should thereby have an opportunity of enriching himself with impunity, while the true man<sup>193</sup> gets nothing, but the evil I believe is irremediable.

What ought to have happened at Vitoria was an orderly confiscation of the baggage train by the army, posting of guards, inventory, a report to the government, and sale of the captured goods at public auction. At that point money realized ought to have been distributed to everyone in the army according to a prescribed formula, generals taking the largest cut, private soldiers the smallest. The navy had been using the prize system for years. In the army, horses captured by cavalry detachments, for example, were supposed to be treated as prizes. The system was more honored in the breach than the observance, however. A General Order of 1811 indicates that the system was shaky then. At Vitoria

it failed utterly, but the concept of spoils, as opposed to prizes, was very much alive. It is possible that the valuables left on a corpse on the battlefield were also in the spoils of war category, at least in the minds of the despoilers, though it is hard to see any legitimacy in robbing one's own officers and men.<sup>194</sup>

The prize money system looked logical and fair to officers and it was fair in the sense that all participants were rewarded and not just those who saw the booty, but it probably seemed less fair to soldiers' wives whose husbands could expect a few shillings as their share. More than five million Spanish dollars, Joseph's paychest, disappeared after Vitoria, of which only 100,000 ever reached the British army's military chest. Wellington was understandably bitter about the disappearance of specie. There was a specie shortage and he had intended to use the money to pay off arrears, and to finance the next campaign.

The spoils of war I tell you plain  
Are a wooden leg or a golden chain.

For most private soldiers the wooden leg was more likely than gold. If disabled they would be lucky to receive a shilling a day. It is deplorable, though not surprising, that they and their wives pocketed what they could of the Vitoria loot.<sup>195</sup>

Although the plunder of the baggage train after Vitoria provoked Wellington to describe his soldiers as the "scum of the earth,"<sup>196</sup> the Vitoria episode was relatively goodnatured. There are no accounts of rape, for example, although large numbers of women were captured.<sup>197</sup> The sack of the besieged towns, however, was pure horror.

A rule of warfare, of very long standing, governed the conduct of sieges. A besieged town was given several formal opportunities to surrender after it had been invested. If the besieged commander refused the final chance to surrender and the place was taken by storm, with the attendant slaughter among attacking soldiers, then the town was given over to the soldiery to be sacked.<sup>198</sup> The storming of a well-defended fortress town was always more costly than an ordinary battle. Thus the sack may be regarded as a form of bribery.

What a frightful picture is this of a town carried by storm!--it is true, nevertheless, and unfortunately for the sake of humanity, it is considered necessary; because if such latitude was not allowed to the soldiery, I believe that <sup>199</sup>few fortresses would be carried by assault. . . .

The stormers, aware well in advance of the ordeal they would have to endure, repressed their natural fears and performed heroic acts which in retrospect seemed berserk. When the town was entered, the unnatural stoicism gave way at once in a display of mindless destruction, looting, drunkenness and rape that observers repeatedly call a frenzy. Although the plunder motive was well-calculated ahead of time, the sack itself was an act of sustained madness.<sup>200</sup>

After the assault on Ciudad Rodrigo, the soldiers rioted overnight but were brought to order the next day by their officers. At Badajoz, the scene of fierce resistance and terrible carnage, it was harder to bring the army under control. The sack of Badajoz lasted two days and two nights and was remembered with horror in the memoirs. San Sebastián was skillfully defended by the French commander. Several assaults on the town walls were tried before



British forces entered the city. As at Badajoz the successful troops went berserk, looting and raping to such a degree many observers do not even attempt to describe details and resort to appalled generalization. In the process of drunken riot, fires were started and the town burnt to the ground. The Spanish were understandably bitter and there was some suggestion, angrily rejected by Wellington, that San Sebastián had been deliberately burnt.<sup>201</sup>

The role of women in these events is not entirely clear, yet some were seen to participate in the sack of Badajoz alongside the soldiers, although they did not have the soldiers' excuse for frenzy. The women, like the men, were foully drunk, indeed their riotous conduct may be attributed entirely to drink and greed. Some of the women, perhaps most of them, remained outside the walls where they were set to guard the loot brought out by the rioters. For days after the siege, the camp resembled a fair or market with crowds of Spaniards from the countryside bargaining for the looted goods. The sack of Badajoz was very profitable. Sums as high as a thousand Spanish dollars were realized by soldiers worth a shilling a day, yet there was no attempt to charge anyone with theft.<sup>202</sup>

The women's profit motive is clear enough. What is incomprehensible is that they must have known full well the scenes of rape that were enacted within the walls. There was probably little they could do to stop the rioting soldiers, which does not exonerate them from profiting in a carnival of loot and orgy that included rape

almost as a matter of policy. Nuns in particular were singled out as prey, but no female inhabitant was exempt and indeed this aim of the victorious army was so well known in advance of the storm that some prudent men took extraordinary precautions to hide their women before the city fell.<sup>203</sup>

The Spanish were particularly obsessed with protection of the chastity of their women, so that the vengeful intent of rape in these sieges was as clearly intended to damage the male citizens' property in their women as it was to terrorize the women themselves. The anguish of the women was almost incidental to the insult to the men. The words associated with war crimes of this period--pillage, plunder, sack, rapine and rape--have common associations with violent acquisition or destruction of property in the course of war. Wellington used the term "outrage" indiscriminately to describe both rape and pillage, and the first meaning listed in the OED for rape is "the act of taking anything by force, the violent seizure of goods."<sup>204</sup> (My italics.) Sexual violation of women is the third meaning. Words are not actions or intentions, of course, but they do suggest the meaning of acts and intents.<sup>205</sup> Rape did not occur in the plunder after Vitoria on any such scale; indeed, it is not mentioned. Probably the element of vengeance was missing.

Apparently the women with the army at Badajoz considered the rape of the women of the town as a seizure of goods. Possibly they were too drunk to care. This matter is especially difficult to understand when one realizes that the fear of rape was always present among the women with the army. Women captured by the French

might be routinely returned under escort rather than being kept as prisoners of war, but they could just as routinely expect to be raped before they were sent back.<sup>206</sup> An unprotected woman straying from the line of march was also subject to the danger of rape by any drunken or lecherous male passer-by, one reason why widows rarely attempted to remain single if they meant to stay in the Peninsula. Women with the army displayed a degree of protectiveness toward other wives, even outside their regiment, and the regimental band of women was a source of mutual aid. The army wives at Badajoz, their judgment distorted by drink or greed, seem to have been unable to extend that supportive attitude to the women of Badajoz.

A catalog of crimes of passion--murder, adultery, abduction, illicit elopements, murder-suicide pacts--and of property crimes like embezzlement and the theft of paychests might easily be drawn up from episodes recounted with relish or shock in the memoirs, but such crimes might as well have occurred in London--or on Hounslow Heath.<sup>207</sup> The business of this chapter has been to illustrate categories of crime committed by soldiers and their wives and followers which the conditions of war created or facilitated.

Crimes committed by the army in the Peninsula and by its followers fall into two large, untidy categories: straightforward crimes of gain or passion of the sort common in the parent culture, which war made easier, and crimes licensed by the culture and history of war. The crimes of gain in the first category, when committed by women, were sometimes motivated by need, sometimes by

resentment at their economic plight, sometimes by simple habit.

Conditions in the countryside and in towns along the line of march provided special opportunities for vandalism and theft. Crimes in the second category, however, required a fundamental change of values, a loosening of the constraints of the parent culture and adoption of an alien mentality. On the third day after Badajoz fell, Wellington issued a General Order to the army: "It is now full time that the plunder of Badajoz should cease. . . ."208

The resignation in the face of the sack of the city implicit in the wording of that order illustrates the special mentality of war.

With regard to women, no more eloquent illustration of that mentality exists than their acquiescence in the rape of the women of Badajoz.

## CHAPTER VI

### ENDNOTES

<sup>166</sup>J. J. Tobias, Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century (London: B. T. Batsford, 1967), pp. 36-40, 54-5.  
Barbara Hanawalt, in "The Female Felon in Fourteenth Century England," in Susan Mosher Stuard, ed., Women in Medieval Society (Harrisburg: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), pp. 125-40, demonstrates, by examining court records, that most crimes of that era were not sex-linked. Carol Z. Wiener, "Sex Roles and Crime in Late Elizabethan Hertfordshire," Journal of Social History, VIII (Su 1975), 38-60, and J. M. Beattie, "The Criminality of Women in 18th Century England," Journal of Social History, VIII (Su 1975), 80-116, indicate that, while men were charged with many more criminal acts in their periods, most crime categories were not sex-linked. Women, however, not only committed fewer crimes, the crimes were also likely to be less grave than men's, and women were more likely to be charged as accomplices. Tobias' work, which includes the war years, discusses women's crimes in a half-chapter devoted to children's crimes. The implication is that most crimes were not sex-linked, but the lack of specific information on women is deplorable. In defining atrocity, perceptions drawn from the memoirs were checked against Hugo Grotius, The Rights of War and Peace, M. H. Keen, The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) for material on plunder and the sack of besieged cities, and, for rape, with Chapter 3 of Susan Brownmiller, Against our Will, Men, Women and Rape, pp. 23-87.

<sup>167</sup>Fortescue, History of the British Army, vol. 5, pp. 2-11, 302, Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, p. 496.

<sup>168</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 5, p. 247, vol. 10, p. 368, Stevenson, Soldier in Time of War, pp. 132-3.

<sup>169</sup>Wellington, A Great Man, pp. 109-10, 118-19, 136-7, Glover, Peninsular War, p. 41, 89, Weller, Wellington in the Peninsula, pp. 266-7.

<sup>170</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, pp. 168-9, Larpent, Private Journal, vol. 2, p. 160, Schaumann, On the Road, p. 395, Henry, Trifles, p. 85, Robinson, "Peninsular Brigadier," p. 160, Surtees, 25 Years with the Rifle Brigade, pp. 251-2.

<sup>171</sup>Kincaid, Adventures in the Rifle Brigade, pp. 304-5, Bell, Soldier's Glory, p. 143, Woodberry, Journal, p. 173, Larpent, op. cit.

vol. 2, pp. 260-3, Henry, op. cit., p. 87, Schaumann, op. cit., p. 409.

<sup>172</sup>F. Wiener, Civilians under Military Justice, pp. 21-2.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>174</sup>"Statutes and Ordynances (of the 16th C.)," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, VII (1928), 233.

<sup>175</sup>F. Wiener, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>176</sup>Fitchett (Harris), Wellington's Men, p. 218.

<sup>177</sup>F. Wiener, op. cit., p. 197, 204-5, 217, Wellington, A Great Man, pp. 109-10, 118-19, 136-7, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 105, Woodberry, Journal, p. 160, Schaumann, On the Road, p. 259.

<sup>178</sup>Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 5, p. 15.

<sup>179</sup>Davies, Wellington and his Army, p. 103.

<sup>180</sup>Kincaid, Adventures in the Rifle Brigade, p. 173.

<sup>181</sup>Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 74-5, Wellington, Supplementary Despatches, vol. 7, p. 470, Kincaid, op. cit., pp. 170-3.

<sup>182</sup>Schaumann, op. cit., p. 93, Long, Cavalry General, p. 236, Wellington, op. cit., vol. 6, p. 643, Bell, Rough Notes, pp. 45-7, 137.

<sup>183</sup>H. Smith, Autobiography, pp. 167-8, Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, pp. 168-9, Cooper, Rough Notes, p. 105, Schaumann, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>184</sup>Lawrence, Autobiography, pp. 134-5.

<sup>185</sup>Cooke, Memoirs, vol. 2, p. 78.

<sup>186</sup>Gleig, Subaltern, pp. 180-1, Wheeler, Letters, p. 140, Twelve Years' Military Adventures, p. 227.

<sup>187</sup>"A Hussar's Life on Service," United Services Journal & Naval & Military Magazine, II (1829), 37.

<sup>188</sup>Landmann, Recollections, pp. 174-5.

<sup>189</sup>Pakenham Letters, 1800-1815 (London: J. & E. Bumpus, 1914) pp. 77-8.

<sup>190</sup>Kincaid, op. cit., pp. 66-7.

<sup>191</sup> Simmons, British Rifleman, pp. 160-1.

<sup>192</sup> Long, Cavalry General, p. 275, Garrett, "Subaltern," p. 19, Cooke, Memoirs, vol. 1, p. 272, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 89.

<sup>193</sup> Kincaid, op. cit., pp. 228-9.

<sup>194</sup> Keen, The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages, pp. 145-6, Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 6, p. 383, Supplementary Despatches, vol. 7, pp. 149-50.

<sup>195</sup> Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, pp. 188-9, Longford, Wellington, p. 319, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 183.

<sup>196</sup> Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, 296.

<sup>197</sup> Cooke, Memoirs, p. 272, Jonathan Leach, Rough Sketches in the Life of an Old Soldier, (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1831), p. 321, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 94.

<sup>198</sup> Keen, op. cit., pp. 120-3.

<sup>199</sup> Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, pp. 3-4.

<sup>200</sup> Bell, Rough Notes, p. 33, Henry, Trifles, p. 51, Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, p. 4, Surtees, 25 Years with the Rifle Brigade, p. 147.

<sup>201</sup> Longford, Wellington, p. 265, 272, 332, Davies, Wellington and his Army, p. 128, Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 10, p. 246.

<sup>202</sup> McGrigor, Autobiography, p. 277, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 47, Grattan, Adventures, vol. 2, p. 12, Glover, Peninsular War, p. 18.

<sup>203</sup> Surtees, op. cit., p. 147, Henry, op. cit., pp. 51-2, Bell, Rough Notes, p. 33.

<sup>204</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, entry for "rape."

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., for definitions of "pillage," "plunder," "sack," "rapine," and "rape." Wellington, Dispatches, vol. 4, p. 433, vol. 6 p. 576, vol. 9, p. 225, vol. 10, pp. 106-7, 496, Davies, op. cit., p. 128, Brownmiller, Against our Will, pp. 27-29.

<sup>206</sup> Harris, Recollections, p. 64.

<sup>207</sup> Larpent, Private Journal, vol. 1, pp. 94-5, 126, 142-3, vol. 2, pp. 211-13, 246-7, Costello, Military Memoirs, pp. 102-3, Surtees, op. cit., pp. 157-8, H. Smith, Autobiography, p. 172,

Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 222-3, Lawrence, Autobiography, p. 23,  
Donaldson, Eventful Life, p. 185.

208. Wellington, Supplementary Despatches, vol. 7, p. 311.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

The concept of roles, whether sex-linked or more general, is a metaphor drawn from theatre. Women with the Peninsular army were not, of course, playing roles in the theatrical sense. They were living, as they could, and sometimes dying. The memoirists cast what they observed into patterns of behavior which they found familiar and which lent themselves to narrative coherence. The sociological concept of roles owes something to that literary convention. The role of mother (or wife or widow, worker or thief) is partly a dramatic creation, a special form of generalizing. In this thesis "role" may be taken in the sense of culturally approved "model." Women's behavior, even in the parent culture, can rarely have coincided with the model and, in the Peninsula, the deviations were marked.

Soldiers' wives had a great deal in common with British working-class women at home. For women with the army, however, the role of wife was subject to two stresses which affected the shape it took. In demanding that the soldier put his work before his family, the army weakened the husband's capacity to act in his traditionally sanctioned role of protector. Furthermore, mortality among the men markedly increased the likelihood that the wife would become a widow. Both stresses, taken together, seem to have produced

a return to the less emotionally demanding (and satisfying) marriage of convenience as opposed to the romantic marriage, a middle class concept valued as highly by contemporary soldier-observers as by officers. This pattern of convenient marriage held true for remarriages, but not necessarily for first marriages.

The major components of wifeliness, sexual fidelity and task-oriented serviceability, do not differ in kind from the general British pattern, though, for working-class women, the stress on fidelity may have been exaggerated by the army sub-culture beyond what was expected of them at home. Contemporary accusations of working-class promiscuity, however, were almost always leveled at women's behavior before marriage, so that fidelity in wives may have been a strong expectation as home as well. Certainly fidelity received formal sanction from society, and Peninsular memoirists seem to have expected it of soldiers' wives.

This expectation may mask an illusion, however. In no respect were the print sources more disappointing than on the question of sexuality, male and female. Editing, or self-editing, probably accounts for the dearth of information on sexual behavior, for sexual episodes were the kind of material most likely to have been censored when the memoirs saw print. There is a great deal of romanticism among the younger memoirists (Lt. Woodberry is a prime example) and much curiosity about Spanish and Portuguese nuns.<sup>209</sup> Apart from August Schaumann, who is frank and possibly given to fantasy, almost no first person accounts of male sexual behavior occur in the sources, however. A study of the manuscripts might

produce some useful information on male sexuality, though the censorship may have occurred before pen met paper, but it is most unlikely to produce enlightenment on the subject of female attitudes toward sexuality. That could not be expected and is a good reason to deplore the lack of female sources. The manuscripts might indicate other limits to the fidelity of soldiers' wives than the economic one this paper describes, however. Fidelity must be seen as an expectation, an ideal, of wifeliness.

The wife's orientation to service, on the other hand, is unequivocally demonstrated in the sources. Women are seen repeatedly exerting themselves to make their husbands comfortable--bringing them food, laundering, mending, cooking, nursing, all tasks they would have been expected to perform for their husbands at home, but here performed in difficult and unfamiliar conditions. Observers noticed soldiers' wives performing extraordinary feats of wifely service as well--carrying the sixty pound knapsack on the march, for example. Service may be seen both as an expression of affection and as an assertion of wifely identity. Because a wife was expected to be useful, the wife who took pride in serviceability, who went to great lengths to demonstrate her usefulness to her husband, was clearly a formidable individual, a hero-wife.

Ironically, this aspect of the wife's role was more gravely threatened by the army itself than any other activity women with the army undertook, including looting. Army support mechanisms--notably the commissariat and the medical branch--had begun to provide

precisely those services through which the "useful" wife defined her role. As the army's support systems improved, the wife's service-ability would eventually be rendered redundant on campaign.

The army made no effort at all to undercut motherhood by providing support services. The role of women as mothers was more directly threatened by the physical dangers to which campaigning subjected them. The threat of death was always present. The danger was greater when the army had to move rapidly and unexpectedly, and at its worst when discipline broke down. Perhaps the most interesting economic contrast between the family on campaign and the family at home lies in the relative uselessness of children as contributors to subsistence. The child's importance in the family must have diminished in this regard, though observers do not indicate any lessening of maternal concern. Whether or not soldiers' wives conformed to the model of wifeliness provided by their culture, they were apparently conventional mothers. The greater risks they took as mothers may even have intensified their attachment to the maternal role.

An overview of family relationships on campaign suggests the great tenacity of the traditional family as institution and idea. Given the mortality of husbands and the economic inutility of children, the idea of the family must have survived in the conditions of war largely because these women were determined that it would. The ideal of romantic marriage was less durable.

Like the wife's service orientation to the husband, women's work was threatened by army institutions, chiefly in the second

category, involuntary service. Nursing, thanks to a later war, has become an archtypically female profession. At the time of the Peninsular War it was strictly an amateur activity. Although women did not function well as nurses outside the marriage bond, medical care was so generally inadequate that nursing was not yet in immediate jeopardy as a female role, but Sir James McGrigor's orderlies and surgeons' mates represented the shape of the professional future.

Apart from conventional paid work, largely domestic, which the war caused women to perform in unconventional circumstances, the most interesting gainful employment available to women with the army was as sutlers. This livelihood engaged women in the parent culture also, in the shape of the rural pedlar and the urban street vendor, but it took on much greater utility in the context of a military campaign. The commissariat, although it improved in the course of the war, was not yet efficient, but even in an army with efficient supply services there will always be goods that soldiers want and are not issued. The commissariat posed a far greater threat to serviceable wives than it posed for women as sutlers. As sutlers, the women with the army enjoyed greater economic independence and importance than they could possibly achieve as domestic servants, their other major choice in employment.

The mobility of the women with the army, which was thrust upon them by the need to supplement the ration, stands in contrast to their relatively stationary mode of living in Britain. Even though soldiers and their wives were drawn from a fairly rootless

level of the working class, it is unlikely that most of these women were used to the day-to-day mobility their donkeys afforded them in the Peninsula. The army itself moved but, relative to soldiers, wives were even more mobile. They rode out tangent to the line of march, foraging, gathering brush for shelters in bivouac, bartering for food and stealing it when unsupervised, exploring the countryside for quicker routes to their destination of the day than the quartermaster had given the column; in short, the women were improvising responses to their daily needs, rather than relying on routine. Their freedom of movement, so much greater than their husbands', was sometimes resented, notably when it enlarged their opportunities for plunder, but freedom was what women gained in exchange for their relative deprivation. Freedom of movement was necessary to their survival and tolerated when it did not directly impede the columns. The women took advantage of it in every way.

Apart from the retreats, brief but intense catastrophes, it is surprising how rarely British women appear in the memoirs as victims. This good fortune may have been specific to the Peninsular War and would probably not hold true as a generalization about camp followers. Women appear as war-victims in the memoirs, but British women seem more often to play the role of witness, and sometimes of participant.

The British army, fairly well disciplined, acted as a shield for soldiers' wives, a shield civilian women did not have. The army stood between British wives and victimization. The wives were more apt, as in the case of summary punishments, to be victims of the army itself than of the French.

Perhaps the most startling role of women with the army--the woman as plunderer--shows this participatory stance. In the parent culture some women were thieves or fences, but there can have been little sense that these criminal roles were sanctioned by the culture. In the systematic, speedy looting of the dead after a battle and in disposition of plundered goods after successful sieges, criminal behavior was not punished to a significant degree. Soldiers, even some officers, profited from plunder, though Wellington inveighed against it, and indeed, succeeded in limiting casual pillage to the point where French peasants preferred a British to a French army among them. He was powerless to prevent some special kinds of looting, however, because the history of war sanctioned them--the lure of spoils outweighed the idea of discipline. Soldiers expected to plunder and their wives joined them in their unsavory habit. Sometimes, as in the looting of the dead, the wives engaged in looting on their own. As war licensed their husbands to kill, it also licensed soldiers and followers to plunder under special conditions. Respectable women, who would not have stolen anything in England, engaged in plunder in the Peninsula almost as if it were routine work.

Twenty years after the war ended an Irish officer's wife wrote down her husband's account of looters on the field at Vitoria. ". . . in running through the thicket (on the battlefield), an officer found a soldier of his company counting gold doubloons into his wife's lap, quite unconscious of . . . danger."<sup>210</sup> This soldier and his wife, counting up their profits, probably understood the

causes and costs of war better than most modern theorists, male or female.

That perception is perhaps the most useful to come out of this study of a very small group of British women in an obscure war. Too many women are apt to think of war as a masculine game, of themselves as waiters and weepers. As these women's lives demonstrate, for good or ill, women have also been participants in the act of making war.



## CHAPTER VII

### ENDNOTES

<sup>209</sup> Lawrence, Autobiography, p. 68, Woodberry, Journal, p. 112, Schaumann, On the Road, pp. 281-2.

<sup>210</sup> Mrs. F. M. Fitzmaurice, Recollections of a Rifleman's Wife (London: Hope, 1851), p. 197.

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